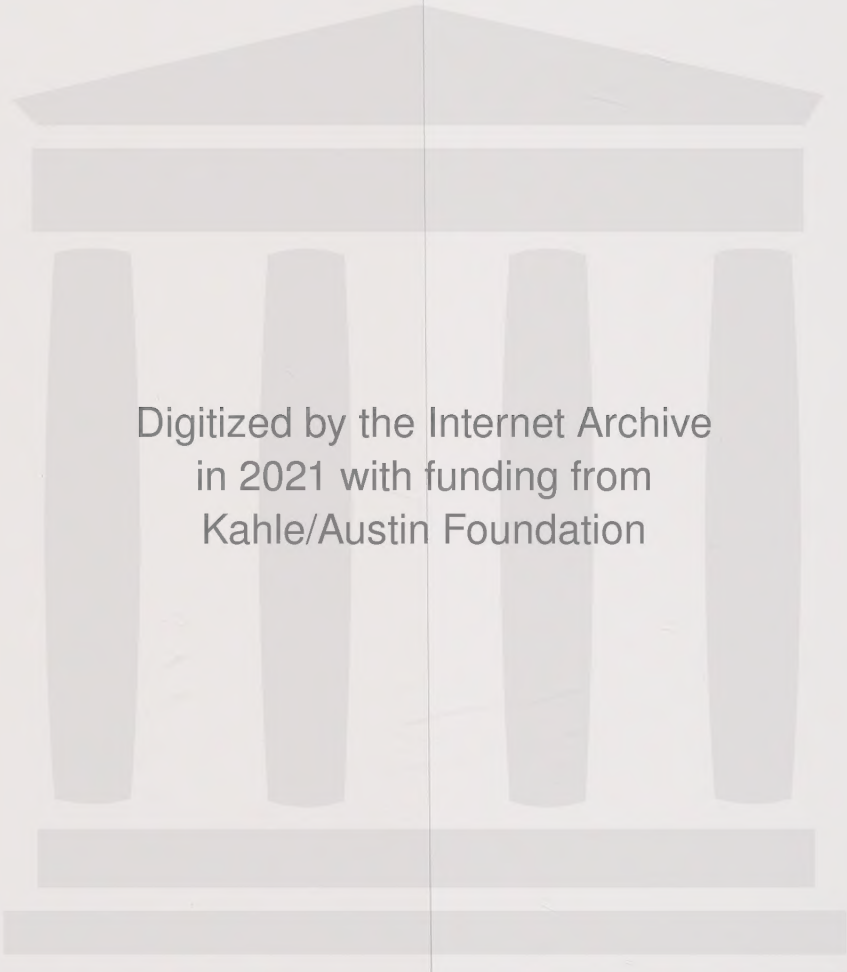
GERHARD TRUMLER

ATHOS

THE GARDEN OF THE VIRGIN

ENGLISH

ΕΚΔΟΣΕΙΣ ADAM EDITIONS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Ouranopolis, Greece
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ATHOS

THE GARDEN OF THE VIRGIN

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ATHOS

THE GARDEN OF THE VIRGIN

text and photographs
GERHARD TRUMLER

ΕΚΔΟΣΕΙΣ ADAM EDITIONS

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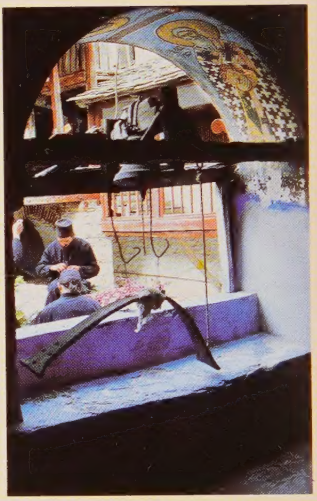

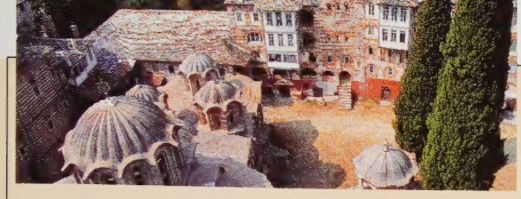

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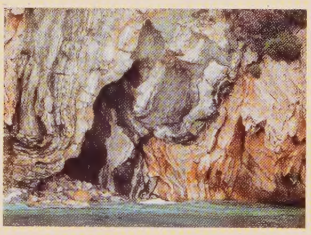


Grace in the Refectory of the Monastery of Chelandari

ATHOS
THE GARDEN OF THE VIRGIN

Of all the monastic communities which have existed in the history of the Orthodox church, only one continues to survive: the monastic state of the peninsula of Mt. Athos. Uninterruptedly, to this day, at the dawn of the third millennium, Athos, a living, vigorous remnant of Byzantine grandeur, has been able to preserve intact its historical, cultural and legal power and prestige.

The Holy Mountain constitutes a unique phenomenon, not only on a European but also on a world scale. With the passing of the centuries, the monastic community of Athos came to attain such an important status morally, culturally and socially, that it was able to develop into an autonomous constitutional state. The Athonite republic stands firmly on the foundations laid by the ancient charter of the Holy Mountain, the *Tragos*, which was signed in 972 by the hegumens of all the monasteries. Its laws and principles formulate a mystical and devotional tradition which, born in the early 4th century AD, has remained alive and vigorous to our day and will certainly continue to do so in the future.

The legal regime of the monastic state is assured and safeguarded mainly by the Constitutional Charter of the Holy Mountain (1926), whose faithful observance is supervised by the Political Administrator who, as a representative of the Greek state, performs the duties of a prefect. The purely spiritual supervision of the Holy Site is the responsibility of the

Ecumenical Patriarchate, and the name of the Ecumenical Patriarch is always mentioned in the ritual orisons of the day or night.

On the Holy Mountain various nationalities have been living together for a thousand years, united in a homogeneous community, which constantly strives for the preservation of unity and harmony within its bosom. Throughout these one thousand years the system of administration has remained immutable, a fact which proves its wisdom and its worth.

Each monastery on Athos is a self-governing entity and regulates the life of the monks under its jurisdiction according to general monastic rules, but also according to its own internal precepts formulated by the monastery itself and ratified by the highest administrative body of the Holy Mountain. However, when more general problems arise, the monasteries must conform to the decisions of the administration.

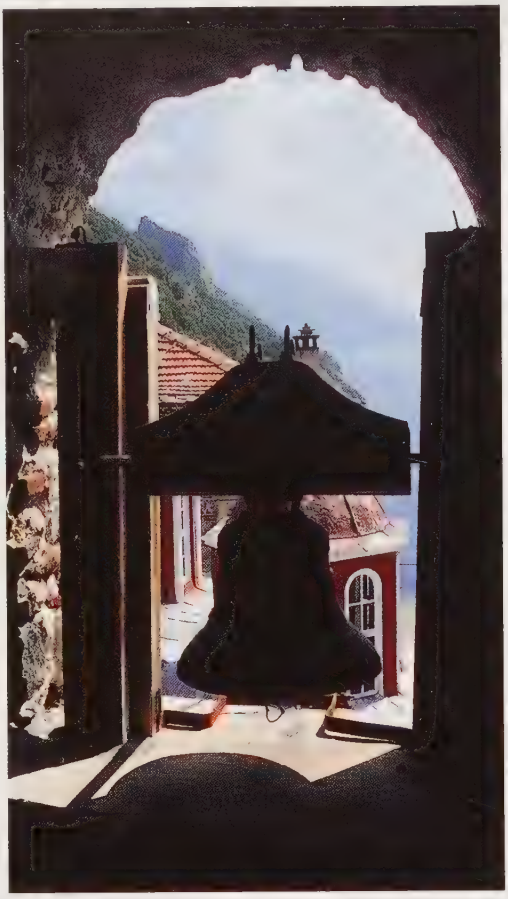
On Athos, besides the 20 main monasteries, there are also 12 Sketes and over 250 Kellia, that is smaller monastic communities which, in their internal structure, are indeed autonomous, but which always come under the jurisdiction of one of the main monasteries.

Each year, the monasteries elect representatives to the highest administrative body, the Holy Community, which has its headquarters in Karyes and meets regularly twice a week to discuss and find solutions to the everyday problems of the Holy Mountain.

The other two administrative bodies also have their headquarters in Karyes: the Biannual Assembly, constituted by 20 extraordinary representatives - mainly hegumens - which meets twice a year, and which is the highest legislative and judiciary organ of the Holy Mountain; and the Double Assembly, composed of 20 regular and 20 extraordinary representatives of the monasteries, which is convened in instances where problems of such a serious nature arise that the Community does not wish to address them alone.

All these, however, only regard the exterior form of life on Athos. Real human life is a profound, almost unfathomable and indescribable mystery, which requires one to go beyond the senses in order to be able to comprehend it. This great mystery takes place when man reaches up towards God and God bends down towards man.

This is the perpetual mystery which one can experience only with the eyes of the



soul; it is this which elevates Athos to the stature of a Holy Mountain. All the rest – repentance, hospitality, the icons, the treasures, the architecture and painting, the psalms and bells, the walks in the forest, the prayers and much else – disclose only an infinitely small part of the mosaic which makes up this mystery.

The monks of Athos call the Holy Mountain "the garden of the Virgin", for it is She whom they honour as the protectress and abbess of the entire monastic community. The grace and blessing of our Abbess give life to all the plants growing in this garden. All these plants differ from each other, but the garden of the Lady of Grace is one and the same. It is this diversity that makes it appear even more wondrous and fascinating.

Unity within diversity is that which defines the spirit and life of the Holy Mountain. For a thousand years, the Athonite monks have forbidden women from entering the Holy Mountain, because they truly love women. Women are absent from Athos, but the Virgin intimates their presence everywhere and always.

The Athonite monks are subject to the same human weakness as other men: they love themselves, and this is a love beyond reason. This is the love that each monk struggles against and tries to transform into love towards God and towards all beings. Every human being is made in God's image and is therefore worthy of all our love and respect. On Athos, natural isolation from the outside world is, indeed, the general rule, but its inhabitants have created a community which is open to receive not only the monks themselves but all God's creatures.

The foundation and essence of the unity that prevails on the Holy Mountain is faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. This unity, therefore, derives from Christ himself and not from man. It is the fruit of a godly intervention realised with the cooperation of man. The self-sacrifice needed to ensure this unity constitutes the starting-point and the focus of the spiritual life not only of every Athonite monk, but of every true Christian as well.

The Son of God is the best example of this unity: through his Crucifixion he recreated the world, he brought it back to life. Thus,

every true Christian must die, as does the monk, in order to live. The monk renounces society in order to discover it. He chooses nothing, in order to gain everything. Many historians, basing themselves on historical facts, see Christian monks as the creators of Western civilization. Initially, it was the Gallic and later the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon monks who spread the Gospel in 7th and 8th-century Europe. They were subsequently followed by the Benedictines, whose contribution to the development of a spiritual life and of culture and civilization up to the Middle Ages was a considerable one.

This invaluable contribution of the cultural institutions of the time stemmed from an intense internal search, in accordance with the words of Christ: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God...and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33)

At that time Europe became the centre of civilization, not merely because the monks translated Virgil and Ovid, nor because they founded schools, built churches and created wondrous works in gold. It was due much more to their ascetic life, which led them to spiritual beatitude and to serenity of the soul, to regions towards which no science and no technical skill could convey them. "*Strive to acquire the spirit of peace and a thousands souls around you will find salvation!*" These were the words of a saint from the East.

When our brothers from the West come to Athos, they rediscover the roots of their civilization. They discover that our spiritual tradition is the same as that by whose tenets

A monk beside the semantron of the Monastery of Docheiariou

their predecessors, in particular the monks of the Western Church, lived before the Schism came to destroy the spiritual union of Europe.

The young men – Greek, Slav, but also Western European – who decide to follow the monastic life on Athos, are trying to escape from the philosophy of modern thought, from the undermining of morality and the levelling of culture. And often these young men choose those very monastic communities which follow the strictest ascetic rules. This ancient way of life of the Athonite monastic community, tried and found worthy throughout many centuries, responds to and fully satisfies the spiritual needs of men. In this way of life the young monks discover the joy and meaning of life, which during this brief presence of man on Earth is but the preparation for a life eternal.

So what is this Athonite way of life? In contrast to contemporary social and political systems - regardless as to whether these are liberal or authoritarian - which often profess to offer true life, but which, in fact, limit or even destroy the spiritual freedom of human beings, the Athonite monastic community has retained the traditional way of life which has its roots in faith in the Holy Trinity and remains almost unchanged since the time of the first Church. In the Holy Trinity there co-exist three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one and consubstantial, but simultaneously three infinite persons. This knowledge gives life to human beings and allows them to understand that, on the one hand, they are not annihilated through their incorporation in a monastic community, and that, on the other hand, despite their personal particularities, they are not relegated to a level of unsociable individuality. In the Athonite monastic community the spiritual individuality of each one is in no danger, because, faced with the problems presented by community life, each can seek for a solution in the Gospel and in the Bible.

God made man in his own image. Therefore, man can find happiness only through sacrificing himself, because only so will he be able to achieve a closer spiritual relationship with his fellow-man. The Athonite monk has understood that he can overcome his animal instincts only if he denies his tendencies and personal interests. Only thus, like one newly born, can he open his soul and receive the mystery of spiritual brotherhood. This way of life which the individual monk must follow is the rule which shows how a community can be built and preserved by men who are characterized by greater or smaller differences in temperament, in age, in culture, in land of origin. The existence of the Athonite monastic community for over one thousand years proves that this society has the ability to incorporate and to assimilate its heterogenous elements, and in this way to renew itself after every crisis it overcomes, a fact which confirms its moral vigour.

Today, apart from the Greek, Russian,

Wall painting depicting Christ enthroned (Pantocrator monastery)

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The view from the bell tower towards the Katholikon (Koutloumousiou Monastery)

Bulgarian, Rumanian and Serb monks, many others from North and South America, as well as from Asia and Australia, have come to live on Athos. All these make up an admirable whole which amalgamates differences to form a single entity. They are bound by the links of their profound faith, which overcomes all the differences resulting from their various national origins, but also the transitory disagreements which arise. This faith offers to each Athonite monk a life in which he can freely develop his spirit and, by the Grace of God, fulfill his potential as a human being. The Athonite monks live their faith in common, but each monk does so in his own way and thus, according to the particularity of each, contributes to the formation of a complete picture of a community.

Another characteristic of life on Athos is zeal. In contrast to fanaticism, which constitutes the pathological expression of our beliefs, zeal is the conscious and dynamic perseverance in our faith. Faith is not imposed on anyone by force. On the contrary it is established and confirmed through our own experience, and this consciously experienced confirmation brings about an even steadier perseverance, which takes the form of zeal. It is, of course, well known how zealously faith and tradition are cultivated on Athos. This zeal in the adherence to tradition is one of the main features of the community of the Holy Mountain. And this, because spiritual tradition is the main source from which the Athonite monks draw their principles, by following which their inner life expands and finds fulfilment.

Legend is also a part of life on Athos. Here,

we still live in a world of miracles, of visions, of prophecy; and yet this world is as actually existent and real as is our everyday life. A historical truth is the nucleus of the legend; this nucleus, however, is surrounded by additional concepts and symbols. The legend thus gives a different dimension to the experienced event, where everything happens as a result of divine action. On Athos, the existence of categories of knowledge arising from the objectification of God and excluding His acts from history, is inconceivable. "*With us, legend does not contradict reality, it is itself reality and truth.*"

Another element of the spirituality on Athos is *Hesychia* (Quietude). This continual contemplation of a world beyond the transient and temporary through quietude is a gain, when the Christian decides to renounce, in his own way, the "world", that is the "destructive spirit" of our times. His aim should be a life "within the world" but not "with the world". It is not the place which characterizes Christian behaviour, but the manner. These, then, are the eternal values on which life on Athos is based, and they can constitute for us all a common good, because they have always been a common good in the past.

Monastic life must not appear to those that live in the outside world as a strange and unexplainable phenomenon. Christian life remains the same for all of us, as long as the final goal of life, and our course towards this goal, is the same for all of us. Monastic life is a heavenly gift to humanity, and exists in order to preserve the true Christian essence of the human race. Orthodox Christianity is neither a religion nor an ideology, it is a way of life for man, whom God has created in his own image.

Having in mind the principles and particularities of life on Athos which we have described, the reader will be able to comprehend with greater immediacy the pictures of this life which are contained in this book and, so to speak, "live" them.

The heart of the artist, through his love for Athos, has made the pictures speak, with marvellous expressiveness, a language whose meaning only those who are receptive to the message of Athos in our times can perceive and penetrate.

The phiale of the Monastery of Esphigmenou

ATHOS
THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

In northern Greece, the fertile peninsula of Chalkidike, like Poseidon's trident, thrusts its prongs southwards, into the deep-blue Aegean. Just here, on the eastern-most promontory, the Holy Mountain reaches skywards, rising to an altitude of over 2000 metres. At the narrowest point joining Athos to the rest of the peninsula - barely 2000 strides in width - the traces of Xerxes' isthmus survive to this day.

According to historical tradition, the Persian ruler, in 480 BC, cut a canal so that his fleet might sail through and avoid the dangerous winds and treacherous rocks of the Nymphaion cape, where Darius' Persian fleet had sunk, in 492 BC.

Some of the monasteries on the Holy Mountain are built on the verdant slopes of the densely wooded mountain range, which, divided by many ravines, finally rises up to the impressive stone cone of Athos. These monasteries are built either near the crystal waters of generous and life-giving springs, or near small streams which flow down the mountainsides. Other monasteries have been built on the coast, sometimes actually on bleak and wind-swept rocks just above the level of the sea.

On the very sheer southern coast of the promontory of Athos, an area called Thebaïs and also known as the "Vertical Desert" or the "Desert", there is no great monastery. In this rocky and well-nigh inaccessible region the pious monks live in *Sketes* (monastic

dependencies), *Kellia* (establishments of two to six monks, living in a small house with its own church) or yet in *Kalyves* (smaller buildings with a chapel inside the *Sketes*) or *Kathismata* (small cottages, usually inhabited by an individual monk on land near the monasteries). This is where hermits have chosen to retreat, since they consider life, even in the great monasteries of Athos, too worldly. They live in caves or in inaccessible "eyries" clinging to the precipitous, inhospitable, bare rock face. There, half-naked, always fasting, and always praying, they seek heavenly bliss, as saints, devoted only to their dialogue with God. Many Athonite monks speak with awe of several of these anchorites who, it is said, pray in a state of levitation.

The twenty monasteries still inhabited on Athos today are subject, in terms of their number and hierarchical position, to the Constitutional Charter of the Holy Mountain, and administer, independently of each other, the remains of the lands which they still hold in Greece proper and in the area of Chalkidike. They themselves cultivate the fields they possess inside the territory of the Holy Mountain, or else supervise the labourers from the Greek mainland whom they employ. Only as regards purely spiritual matters and issues do the monasteries of Athos come under the jursidiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The highest administrative body of the monastic republic of Athos is the Holy Community, elected annually on the 1st of January for the duration of a year and composed of a representative of each of the twenty monasteries. The monasteries are grouped, according to the hierarchy of the Holy Mountain, in fours, and in each group one of the main monasteries, that is the Great Lavra, the Vatopedi monastery, the Iviron Monastery, the Chelandari monastery and the Dionysiou Monastery, holds the principal position.

The executive body of the monastic state is the *Holy Epistasia*, composed of four representatives of the monasteries which have been grouped together as we have mentioned, each group assuming the duties of the Epistasia for a year. The groups were established by the Constitutional Charter which is based on the monastic rules of the Holy Mountain laid down in 1783 and ratified by law in 1926. The order

ΚΙΒΩΤΟΣ ΡΟΜΕΝΗ ΝΤΗ ΠΟΛΥ
ΙΛΗΜ
ΑΑΑ

Monastery of Karakallou. A wall painting of the Virgin (1763), described in the Painter's Manual as: "a golden font and the Virgin in the centre with upstretched hands".

of succession of the groups may not change under any circumstance.

The head of the *Holy Epistasia* is the *Protos*, also known as *Protepistates*, who is appointed for one year by his Monastery. He belongs to one of the five leading Monasteries that assume the office of *protepistasia* in turn. The Protepistatis is installed on the 1st of June and his term of office begins on the same day. However, political authority is exercised by the Administrator of the Holy Mountain, who is responsible for the maintenance of public order and security and who answers directly to the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

All these spiritual and civil authorities of the Athonite Republic have their headquarters in Karyes, the capital of Athos, which is linked to its port, Daphne, by a winding dirt road. There is a bus service on this road. The "*diamonitirion*", the permission to stay on Athos, is today issued in Ouranoupolis. Without such a paper, one is not even allowed to take the boat from Ouranoupolis to Daphne, the official port of entrance to Athos.

Today the monks live in the monasteries of Athos according to austere coenobitic rules. Here the ownership of personal property is

Pages. 24-25 ***"The Ark at Jerusalem" by Theophanes of Crete, in the Katholicon of the Stavronikita Monastery.***

strictly forbidden. The monks pray, work and live a simple and pure life, as equal members of a community. The hegumen of each monastery is in office for life and is elected by monks who have completed at least six years in that monastery. The responsibility for each monastery is in the hands of the hegumen only. Legislative power is in the hands of the *Gerontia,* a body of venerable and experienced monks. Absolute obedience is the rule in the monastery, fasts are very strictly kept and each monk performs the duties allotted to him, the *"diaconemata"*, as his contribution to the community, without remuneration or the possibility of acquiring any personal property.

In the idiorrhythmic monasteries, which no longer exist today, and in most of the small monastic communities -the *Sketes* or *Kellia* - prayer and church liturgies are held in common, but, beyond that, each monk can lead his life as he wishes, although he is always dependent on, and under the protection of the monastery. For the tasks assigned to him by the monastery he is paid a minimal sum of money which he is allowed to administer himself. He may also regulate his own way of life, according to his needs and capabilities. To this financial independence of the monks in the idiorrhythmic monastic communities corresponds the oligarchic, apparently democratic administration by the *Proistamenoi.* The term of office in the *Synaxis*, the body in whose hands legislative power lies, is lifelong. From its members are chosen two or three monks, the so-called *epitropoi,* who hold executive power for a year. The "idiorrhythmic" system prevailed on Athos in the past, particularly at a time when the community faced grave internal and external dangers. On the basis of the idiorrhythmic rule, individual monks were more independent of the monasteries and could escape the calamities which fate might hold in store for the monastic communities. However, this sometimes resulted in instances of ideological deviations from the ideals of Byzantine monasticism. The idiorrhythmic rule, which flourished particularly in the 18th century, was succeeded in the 20th by the opposite tendency. Today, all the monasteries follow the strict regulations of the coenobitic rule.

The Virgin is held in boundless veneration on Athos and the name of "Garden of the Virgin", given

to the Holy Mountain by the Athonite monks, has its roots in the following tradition surrounding the origin of Athonite monasticism.

After the Ascension of Christ, the Virgin travelled with St. John the Evangelist to Cyprus, in order to visit Lazarus. A terrible storm forced the ship to deviate from its course and to run aground on the shores of Athos, on the site of ancient Acte, where there was then a sanctuary of Apollo. On the spot where the Monastery of Iviron now stands, the Virgin prayed to Jesus to give her this mountain as a gift, even though its inhabitants were idolaters "from one end of Athos to the other". Then the voice of Christ was heard charging her to teach the Gospel in this place: "*May this place be your portion, your garden and your park, a haven of salvation for those seeking to be saved.*" Today, women are strictly forbidden from entering Athos.

During the religious revolts against the Byzantine emperor Leo the Isaurian (717-741) and his despotic son, Constantine Copronymus, a time which has become known in history as the iconoclastic period (Edict of AD 730 against the veneration of icons), many monasteries in Greece proper

In the sewing workshops of the Monastery of St. Paul are sewn all the garments needed by the monks.

were abolished, priceless treasures and statues were destroyed, many books and icons were cast into the flames and many monks were persecuted and killed. Neither did the first small Athonite monasteries of that time escape depredation. Many are the legends and stories about the miracles that occurred during the attacks of the imperial armies against the monastic communities. Following the restoration of the icons to their former position as objects of veneration, decreed by the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 787, the empress Irene the Athenian put an end to the conflicts which, however, only ceased definitively after the reinstatement of the icons decided at the Council convoked by the empress Theodora.

Documents which refer to this Council give us the first positive, historically attested information that Athonite hermits took part in the Council of Constantinople which ratified the victory of Orthodoxy against the iconoclasts. Some decades later, we find mentioned the names of the two first great Holy Fathers of Athos - Peter the Athonite and Euthymios of Thessalonike. Peter was the one who established hermitic life on the Holy Mountain while Euthymios was an advocate of the coenobitic life in monastic communities. Around 880, he founded, near Ierissos, the first monastery housed in a stone building.

In 883, the Byzantine emperor Basil I proclaimed Athos a monastic community by a chrysobull which, like that of the emperor Leo in 893, guaranteed the freedom and inviolability of the Holy Mountain.

In 963, Athanasius the Athonite, who was born in Trebizond and was the spiritual father of the emperor Nicephorus Phocas, founded the first important monastery and the largest on the Holy Mountain - the monastery of the Great Lavra. Athanasius managed to bring together many of the anchorites who, until then, had lived on the Holy Mountain alone, or in small groups in total isolation and to gather them into a new kind of *lavra*, a coenobitic monastery. He defined, in its *"Typikon"*, the way in which the monks in this monastic community should live: in total abstinence from the fulfilment of all personal desires, debarred from the possession of any kind of property, and owing

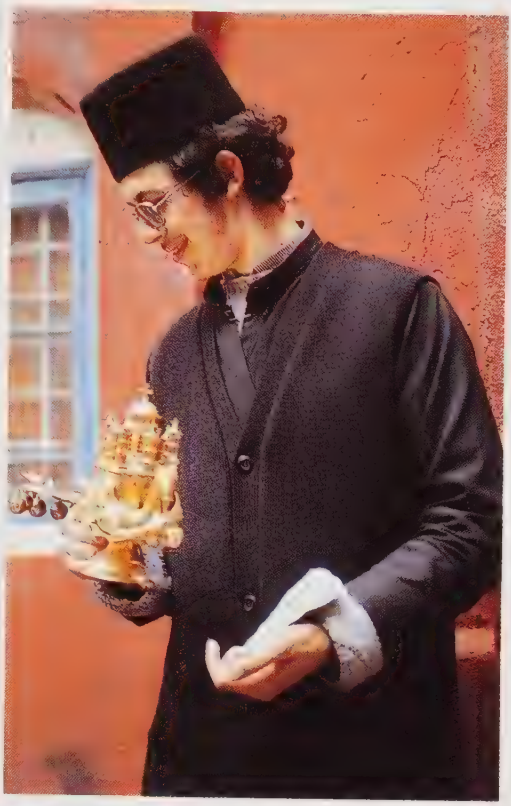
The dental clinic in the Skete of Kerassia.

absolute obedience to the hegumen, as the spiritual guide of the monastic brotherhood.
Most of the inhabitants of Athos, who in their majority were hermit monks, opposed themselves at that time to these unheard-of innovations introduced by Athanasius. After many clashes between Athanasius and his adversary, Paul of Xeropotamos, who contrary to him, believed in total asceticism - in an unalloyed anchoritic life - the emperor John Tzimisces was obliged to intervene and to issue, in 972, a first *Typikon,* a constitutional charter which regulated life, generally, in the Athonite monasteries and which remains in effect almost unaltered. This document is written on a parchment made of goatskin, which is how it came to be known as the *Tragos* (goat).
In the centuries that followed, monks from Georgia and Russia came to establish themselves on Athos, alongside the Greeks, Armenians, Serbs and Bulgarians. A great number of monasteries founded by these monks continue to exist and to flourish, even though some of these (such as the Russian monastery of St. Panteleimon) today house only a very small monastic community.
At the time when the prosperity of the Holy Mountain was at its peak, 30,000 monks lived on Athos. The Athonite monasteries always enjoyed the favour of the rulers of the "native countries" of the foreign monks. These rulers presented the monasteries with gifts in the form of land, as well as of valuable works of art, icons and holy vessels for the liturgy. Several times in the history of Athos, we find pious princes voluntarily giving up power to their sons, in order to spend

the rest of their lives concentrating on spiritual discipline and constant prayer, in the isolation offered to them by the monastery which they themselves had founded or endowed. However, the priceless treasures in the churches and the libraries attracted the interest of robbers, pirates and fortune-seeking mercenaries who scoured the area, plundering and looting. Thus, many monasteries suffered attacks and pillage by these hordes during the 13th and 14th centuries. The monks tried to protect themselves by building high walls and defensive towers, so that the monasteries still look like impregnable fortresses today.

A deep break in the history of the Holy Mountain occurred with the invasion of the Ottoman Turks into the Byzantine Empire and the southern Slav countries, after the battle of Kossovo in 1389. The Holy Mountain had already been under Turkish rule since 1387. After the fall of Thessalonike in 1430 and of Constantinople in 1453, the economic situation of the Athonite monasteries changed radically.

Although the Turkish conquerors respected the spiritual and religious independence of the Holy Mountain and recognized Athos specifically as the "*land where the name of God is glorified day and night*", they did not hesitate to exploit the monasteries economically. The prosperity of the Holy Mountain at that time faced immediate danger. The crisis began with the confiscation of the lands which, though belonging to the monasteries, were outside Athonite territory, as well as with the abolition of the exemption from taxes which had until then been in effect. The capital tax which the monasteries now had to pay laid a



A novice reverently holds a censer, in the shape of a winged dragon with tiny bells and a church on its back.

huge burden on the monastic communities. At this dramatic moment, the rulers of the Danube states - Moldavia, Hungary and Wallachia - as well as the Russian tsars, emerged as patrons and benefactors of the Holy Mountain and its monasteries. Besides their endowments and gifts to the Athonite monasteries, they also allowed the monks to raise money on their own domains.

Despite its enormous financial difficulties, the Holy Mountain remained a religious model and a centre of Orthodoxy, which received in its bosom all those who sought God, regardless of their origin.

During the Greek War of Independence (1821) several monks left Athos to join the

Greek troops and to fight by their side for freedom. The monasteries were abandoned and became an easy prey to looting. The Turkish forces seized or destroyed works of art of priceless value, as well as ancient relics. The old, honoured episcopal see, Ierissos, became the headquarters of the victorious general Mehmet Emin, to whom the Athonite monks who had remained on the Holy Mountain were obliged to pay large sums of money as reparations. These payments finally led to the total financial ruin of the monasteries.

Only about a decade later, after the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829, were the monks who had taken part in the struggle against the Turks permitted to return to Athos.

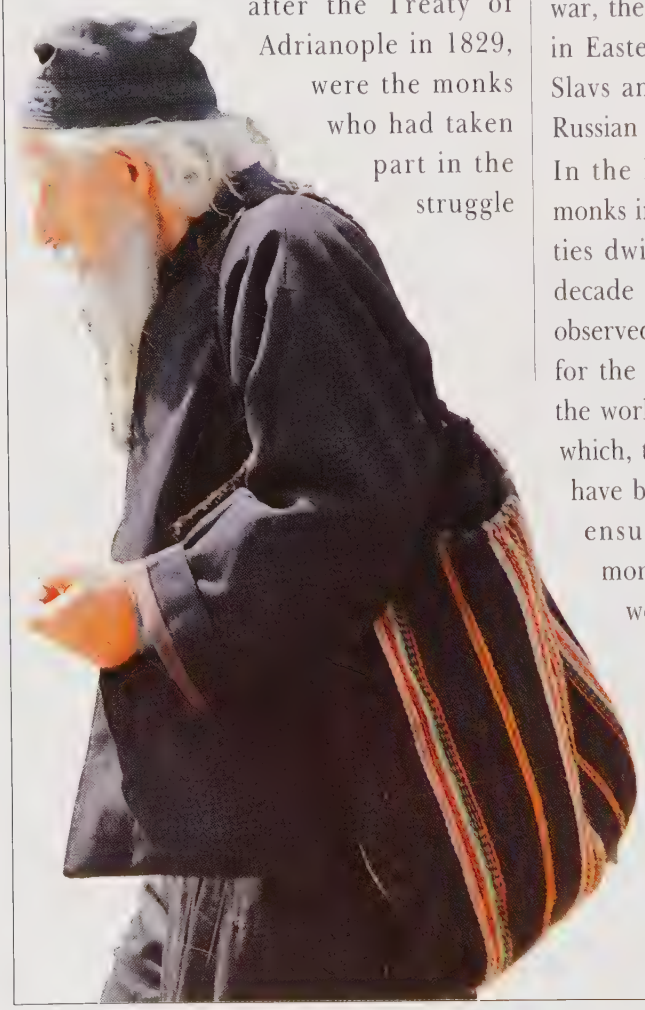
In the last decades of the 19th century, Athos experienced a new period of prosperity. The number of monks increased significantly. Around 1904 there lived on Athos approximately 5,000 monks.

At the end of the First World War Athos was incorporated into the Greek State as a self-governing district.

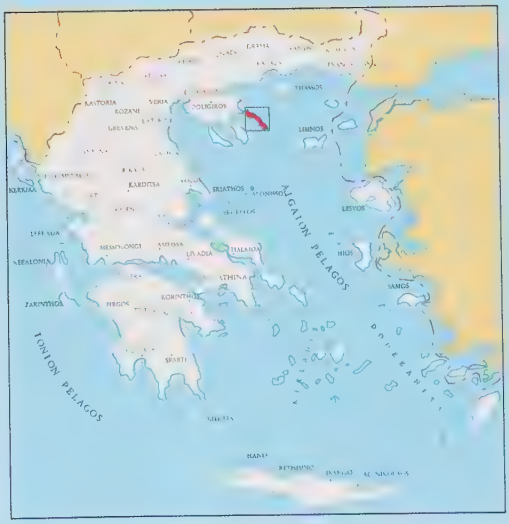
During the Second World War, the German army installed a telephone line connecting all the monasteries among themselves and to the capital, Karyes. After the end of the war, the imposition of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe stopped the influx of Slavs and in particular that of Serb and Russian monks.

In the last few decades the number of monks in several of the monastic communities dwindled increasingly, but since the decade of the '80s a reverse trend can be observed which gives good reason for hope for the Holy Mountain. In many parts of the world, brotherhoods have been created which, together with their spiritual fathers, have been received on Athos and so have ensured the spiritual continuity of monastic life on the Holy Mountain as well as the material reinvigoration of the monastic community, which has endured for over one thousand years.

Gerhard Trumler



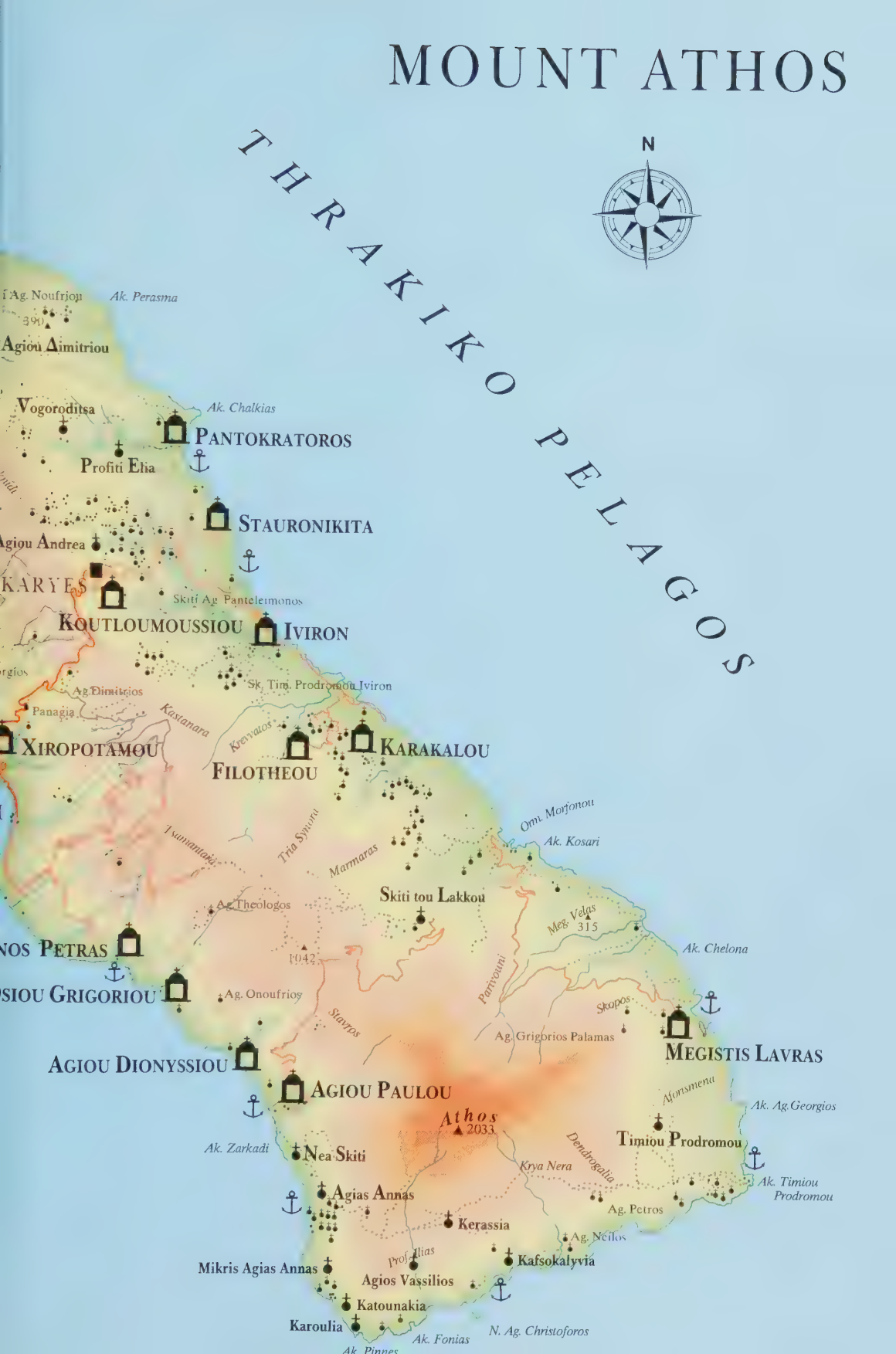
Approaching the entrance to the Monastery of Esphigmenou.



Monastery

Skete

Port


MOUNT ATHOS
THRAKIKO PELAGOS
N
Ag. Noufrjou
Ak. Perasma
390
Agiou Dimitriou
Vogoroditsa
Ak. Chalkias
PANTOKRATOROS
Profiti Elia
STAURONIKITA
Agiou Andrea
KARYES
Skiti Ag. Panteleimonos
KOUTLOUMOUSSIOU
IVIRON
Sk. Tim. Prodromou Iviron
Ag. Dimitrios
Panagia
Kastanara
Krevvatos
XIROPOTAMOU
FILOTHEOU
KARAKALOU
Omn. Morjonou
Ak. Kosari
Tsamantaki
Tria Synora
Marmaras
Skiti tou Lakkou
Ag. Theologos
Meg. Velas
315
NOS PETRAS
1042
Ak. Chelona
SIOU GRIGORIOU
Ag. Onoufrios
Parivouni
Skopos
Stavros
Ag. Grigorios Palamas
MEGISTIS LAVRAS
AGIOU DIONYSSIOU
AGIOU PAULOU
Athos
2033
Ak. Ag. Georgios
Timiou Prodromou
Ak. Zarkadi
Nea Skiti
Krya Nera
Dendrogalia
Agias Annas
Ak. Timiou Prodromou
Ag. Petros
Kerassia
Ag. Neilos
Prof. Ilias
Mikris Agias Annas
Kafsokalyvia
Agios Vassilios
Katounakia
Karoulia
Ak. Fonias
N. Ag. Christoforos
Ak. Pinnes

KARYES
THE CAPITAL OF THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

Almost in the centre of the Athos peninsula, in a thick forest of chestnut and walnut trees 375 metres above sea level, lies the capital of the Holy Mountain, the town of Karyes. To the east it overlooks the restless, deep blue seas of the Strymonic Gulf. Built around the 9th century, the town takes its name from the walnut trees ("*karyae*") which must have grown profusely in this area ever since ancient times, since there once stood here a sanctuary of the goddess Artemis.

Apart from its one hundred or so small *kellia*, the monastic complex of Karyes consists mainly of the church of the Protaton, the administration buildings of the Holy Community and the *konakia*, the residences of the Representatives of all the main monasteries, except those of Koutloumousiou, which lies at a distance of only 500 metres from Karyes. Around this complex are to be found a pharmacy, a post office, a "hospital", administration buildings, mechanics' and craftsmen's workshops, commercial enterprises, as well as two simple guest-houses.

The headquarters of the Holy Community of Mt. Athos.

The building of the Holy Community and the Tower of St. Sabbas, where is kept the "Tragos", the most important charter of the Holy Mountain.

In the heart of the small town, on its main square, stands the Protaton, with its belfry, built in 1781. Surrounding the core of the complex are the very ancient Tower of Saint Sabbas, a secure treasury still in use today, and the building housing the headquarters of the Holy Monastic Community. This building is a much more recent construction than the compact tower, having been erected in the 19th century.

In the very impressive "treasury of the Holy community", apart from 117 valuable historical manuscripts (47 of which are on parchment) and a variety of books, is kept, in a sealed wooden box, the first and most important Typikon of the Holy Mountain, the *Tragos*. This document, a scroll 316 m. long and only 40 cm. wide, has been sewn together from the treated hide of four goats (hence the name *Tragos*, which means goat in Greek). It contains the Charter of the Holy Mountain, drafted in 971/972 by 56 holy men - the hegumens of the Athonite monasteries, church representatives and other monks holding high offices. The *Tragos*, which bears the signature, in red ink, of the emperor Ioannis Tzimisces and is sealed with his chrysobull, constitutes the symbol of the independence of the Monastic Republic "to the end of time". It is the Holy Mountain's most important document and is exhibited only rarely, in extraordinary circumstances, and always in the presence of four members of the administrative body. The metropolitan church of Karyes, the Protaton, which stands opposite the headquarters of the Holy Community, is the most ancient church on Athos (10th century). It is the

A lane in Karyes.

The Deesis in the Community building of Karyes

only church on the Holy Mountain whose architectural type, that of a three-aisled basilica with three apses, deviates from that of the rest of the Athonite churches.

The marvellous wall-paintings in its interior date from the period of the Byzantine emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus (1282-1328) and are among the most precious works of art not only of Mount Athos but of the entire Eastern Orthodox world. These wall paintings have been attributed to Manuel Panselinos, about whose life nothing is known and whose very existence has yet to be historically substantiated. Recent research undertaken in order to ascertain the actual facts has proved that, around 1300 A.D., probably more than one artist of the famous Macedonian School worked on these splendid murals.

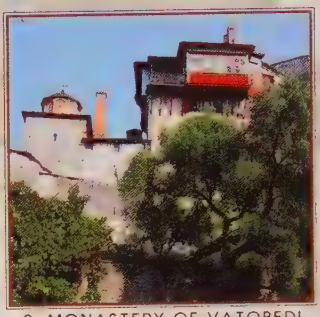
In the Sanctuary, behind the iconostasis of the Protaton, is kept the most famous of the miracle-working icons of the Athos monasteries, the *Axion Esti*, dating from the 8th century. According to tradition, in the 10th century, the Archangel Gabriel sang the hymn of the *Axion Esti* for the first time before this icon of the Virgin and, in response to the prayer of a monk from Athos, he engraved the verses on a stone with his fingernail.

The church is dedicated to the Dormition of the Virgin and celebrates its feast day on 15 August.

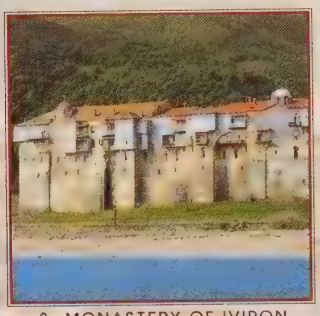
Pages 40-41: ***The church of the Protaton with the wall paintings by Manuel Panselinos, and the Deesis by Theophanes.***

MONASTERIES AND SKETES

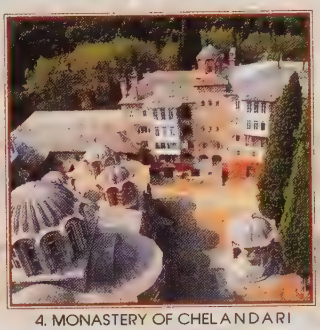
1. MONASTERY OF THE GREAT LAVRA



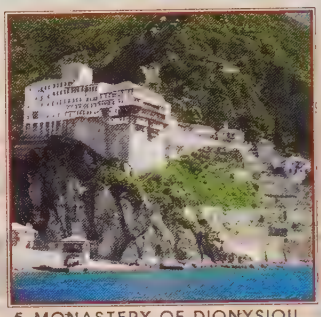
2. MONASTERY OF VATOPEDI



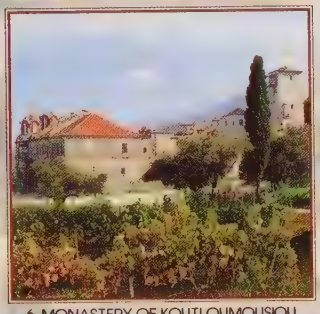
3. MONASTERY OF IVIRON



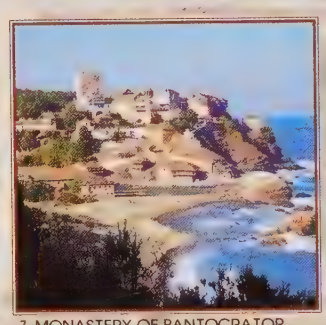
4. MONASTERY OF CHELANDARI



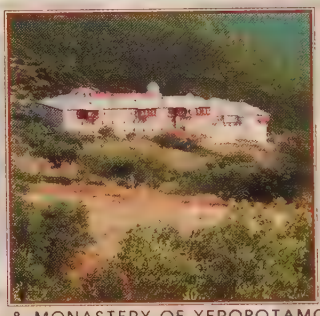
5. MONASTERY OF DIONYSIOU



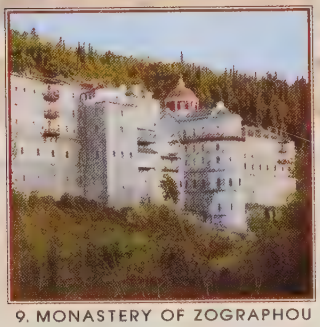
6. MONASTERY OF KOUTLOUMOUSIOU



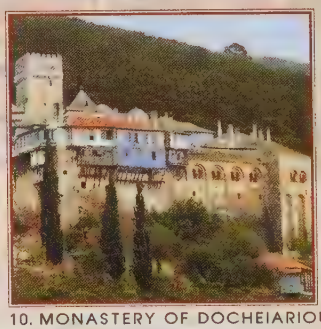
7. MONASTERY OF PANTOCRATOR



8. MONASTERY OF XEROPOTAMOU



9. MONASTERY OF ZOGRAPHOU

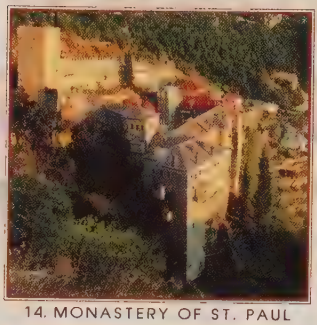


10. MONASTERY OF DOCHEIARIOU

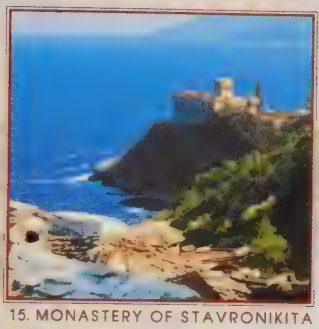
11. MONASTERY OF KARAKALLOU

12. MONASTERY OF PHILOTHEOU

13. MONASTERY OF SIMONOPETRA



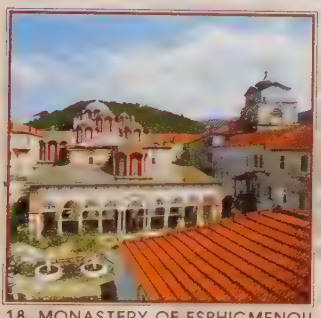
14. MONASTERY OF ST. PAUL



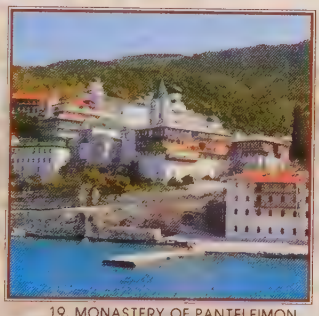
15. MONASTERY OF STAVRONIKITA

16. MONASTERY OF XENOPHONTOS

17. MONASTERY OF GREGORIOU

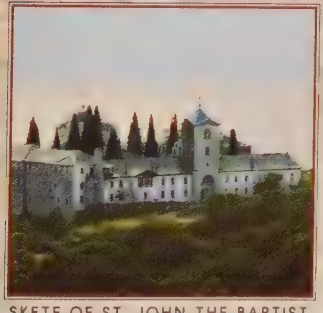


18. MONASTERY OF ESPHIGMENOU

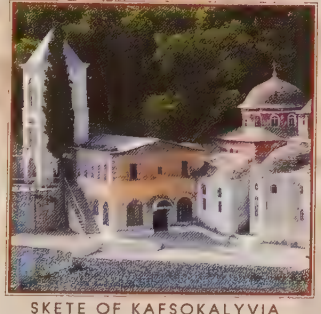


19. MONASTERY OF PANTELEIMON

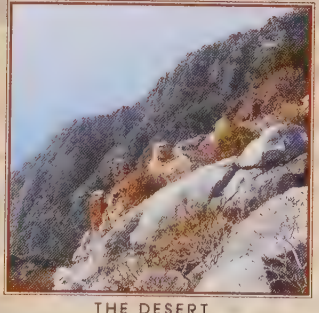
20. MONASTERY OF KASTAMONITOU



SKETE OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST



SKETE OF KAFSOKALYVIA



THE DESERT

MONASTERIES OF ATHOS

MONASTERY OF THE GREAT LAVRA

One of the many courtyards of the Monastery, which resembles a medieval town.

THE GREAT LAVRA

Like a storybook castle, the oldest monastery of the Holy Mountain and the first in hierarchical rank, rises, on the wide crest of a rock, 160 metres above a lonely and inaccessible shore to the south-east, where the massive stone cone of the Athos range eases down to form a characteristic hill.

The numerous buildings of various sizes at the foot of Mt. Athos compose a motley group resembling a mediaeval fortress, encircled by protective walls and by the Tzimisces Tower.

The monastery owes its foundation to a personality who had already acquired mythical proportions during his lifetime: Athanasius the Athonite, from Trebizond - the friend, spiritual father and confessor of Byzantine emperors. It is mainly to Athanasius that the Holy Mountain owes the introduction of strict coenobitic rules, a spiritual loan from the monastery of Saint John of Studium in Constantinople. The material resources for the foundation of the Monastery in 963 were provided by Athanasius' friend, the Byzantine emperor Nicephorus Phocas who, however, was not able or did not wish to fulfill his promise to retire to a monastery on Mount Athos together with Athanasius. Nevertheless, in his effort to atone for the violation of his vow, he showered his friend with large sums of money, rich gifts, icons, relics and parchments for the monastery. In the same year that Athanasius introduced the new type of monastic life into his monastery, he also laid the foundation for the first simple cells, the kitchens and the "hospital". He also planted, as tradition has it, one of the two ancient cypress trees which stand next to the monastery's *phiale*. (The "phialae" of the Holy Mountain are basins in which the

waters are blessed on the first day of each month and on the day of Epiphany). When, in despair over the hostility shown him by the supporters of unorganized monasticism and over the problems they created, he contemplated stopping the building of the monastery, the Holy Virgin appeared to him in a vision and encouraged him to go on.

There are many legends surrounding the figure of Athanasius, such as the story of his struggle with the devil himself. To this day, the iron staff with which, like Moses in the desert, he struck the rock, causing water to gush forth, is reverently preserved. He died around the year 1000, aged almost 80, when, in trying to place the last stone on the arch of the church apse he fell, together with another six of his followers, and was buried under the rubble. After the death of Nicephorus Phocas, the great patron of the newly-established monastery, financial resources ran out and Athanasius' project was in danger of falling through. At that critical moment, the emperor John Tzimisces offered the monastery immediate and generous financial aid. Thus began a new period of development for the Great Lavra. Its history does not differ, substantially, from that of the other monasteries on Athos, although contrary to the others, Athanasius' building was not ravaged by great fires. The monastery alternately flourished and declined, and suffered attacks, arson and pillage by pirates, robbers and the flotsam of mercenaries returning from the Crusades. In the 11th century there were almost 700 monks living in the Great Lavra. Their number subsequently decreased dra-

The back of the Refectory.

matically until, in the mid-17th century, only five monks were left.

In 1655 a great change took place: Patriarch Dionysius III bequeathed his personal fortune to the monastery, thus providing a way out of the pressing crisis created by the monastery's accumulated debts.

Thanks to the constant financial support of the patriarchs of Constantinople and of the rulers of the Danube states - particularly during the period of the Ottoman occupation after the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 - and thanks, later to the financial help of the Russian tsars, the monastery of the Great Lavra managed to regain its ascendancy among the other Athonite monasteries, an ascendancy which it retains, uncontestedly, to this day.

The Katholikon of the monastery, which was built during the period between 963 and 1003 and stands in the centre of the spacious courtyard, constitutes the prototype of Athonite churches. This type provided the model for all the *katholika* of the Holy Mountain, with the possible exception of the Stavronikita monastery. The cruciform basilica follows prototypes of the early Byzantine period. It is crowned by a large dome - symbolizing the heavens - supported by four columns. The central space is richly decorated with murals by the Cretan

The phiale: it is made of a single piece of marble, the dominant decorative feature of which is the double-headed eagle of the Byzantine emperor. Behind it, the Refectory, which is adorned with some of the finest murals on the Holy Mountain.

In the Monastery kitchen a monk is cooking the fish that is to be served on Easter Day, after the end of the period of fasting.

artist Theophanes, the earliest of which date from 1535. The walls and roof of the narthex and the exonarthex were painted in 1854.

Opposite the katholikon stands the Refectory. Both the exterior and the interior of the Refectory are adorned with murals, the earliest of which dates from 1512. They are the work of the Cretan School of Theophanes, and depict scenes mainly from the Old Testament, such us the Second Coming, the Sacrifice of Abraham, the Ladder to Heaven, Paradise, and the Sufferings of the Damned. There is also a wall painting portraying the Tree of Jesse, the genealogical tree of Jesus, as well as a wonderful representation of the Last Supper in the apse, behind the hegumen's throne.

Quite unique, however, are the portraits of the ancient Greek philosophers. Here, the visitor finds Homer next to Solon, Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato, and Plutarch next to Pythagoras.

Behind the katholikon, stands the monastery's library, the richest of the libraries on the Holy Mountain, which has in its keeping the oldest manuscript in majuscules existing on Mt. Athos. It contains extracts of Euthalianos' Greek code, which includes epistles written by the Apostle Paul. Apart from over 20,000 printed books filling the shelves, trunks and chests in the library - among which are found rare and precious incunabula dating from the very earliest period of printing - there are also 2,500 manuscripts which, in their majority, are inscribed

After the Service the monks make their way to the Refectory.

on vellum, as well as valuable documents signed by emperors, patriarchs and sultans. In the Great Lavra's treasury are preserved extremely valuable ecclesiastical vessels, and other treasures: gold-embroidered vestments, icons, chalices encrusted with precious stones, and emblems of the emperors of Byzantium, such as sceptres and imperial cloaks. Here are also kept the pectoral cross and iron staff belonging to Saint Athanasius. Other important and precious relics are Nicephorus Phocas' crown and his *sakkos*, an imperial garment ornamented with precious stones.

There is a lovely story related to the main icon of the monastery, that of the Virgin Koukouzelissa. The emperor Alexius I had been so charmed by the talent of a singer by the name of Ioannes Koukouzelis, that he expressed the desire that the young man marry a princess and remain at the court. The pious youth, however, fled to Mt. Athos with the intention of spending the rest of his life there, as a goatherd. But he could not remain hidden long, as his beautiful voice betrayed him, and the emperor demanded that Ioannes be brought to him. The hegumen refused to comply, however, and from that day on the singer chanted in the monastery only to the glory of the Virgin. One day, being tired, he fell asleep inside the church, and the Virgin came to him in a vision and promised to reward him in heaven for his hymns. When Ioannes awoke, he found to his wonder that he held in his hand a gold coin, which he rever-

The decorated entrance to the thousand-year-old Refectory.

ently offered to the miracle-working icon. The monks of the Great Lavra celebrate the day of the Virgin Koukouzelissa on the 1st of October, although the monastery is dedicated to saint Athanasius and celebrates his feast-day on July.

There are many chapels scattered both within the monastic compound and outside it. The most important one is dedicated to the Forty Martyrs. Here is preserved the tomb of saint Athanasius, covered by a gold-embroidered cloth adorned with his image. Next to it there are two portable icons, one of Jesus and one of the Virgin Economissa. There are 19 chapels outside the monastery, while on the mountain there are another 5 *kathismata* and 40 *kellia*. Three *sketes*, those of St. Anne, St. John the Baptist and Kafsokalyvia, belong to the Monastery, while under its jurisdiction are also the settlements of the "Desert" (see p. 241).

Mural from the exonarthex of the Katholikon.

pp. 56-57: One of the most characteristic crossroads of Mt. Athos: from the Skete of Kafsokalyvia to the Skete of St. Anne, or from the Karoulia via the Katounakia to Kerassiá.

ΑΘΩΣ

MONASTERY OF VATOPEDI

Façades of old houses from the Monastery's idiorrhythmic period.

THE MONASTERY OF VATOPEDI

In the crook of a small bay on the eastern shores of the promontory, at a distance of two hours from the Monasteries of Esphigmenou and Pantocrator, 50 metres above sea level, is built the Vatopedi Monastery. From 1046, year in which the emperor Constantine IX Monomachus signed the second *Typikon*, to this day it is the Vatopedi Monastery which holds the second place in the hierarchy of the Athos monasteries. According to tradition, in the 4th century, during a terrible storm, a huge wave swept the young son of the emperor Theodosius, prince Arcadius, from a boat into the sea. The child was saved thanks to the Holy Virgin and was later found sleeping under a bramble bush ("vatos") on the shores of a bay. To thank the Virgin for saving his son, the emperor Theodosius built the Vatopedi Monastery. It is, however, more likely that the name of the monastery derives from the numerous thorny bushes covering the area from the beach to the fringes of the forest. Historically, it can be said with certainty that the Monastery began to be built in 972, the year of the first Typikon signed by the emperor John Tzimisces. Three monks were the founders of the monastery, Athanasius, Antonius and Nicholas, who later became the hegumen of Vatopedi. Antonius and Nicholas had come from Adrianople to Mt. Athos as disciples of Saint Athanasius, and it was the founder of the Great Lavra who urged them to follow his example. The construction of the first buildings was made possible thanks to the generous donations of the emperor Manuel I Comnenus (1143-1180). At the end of the century, the founders of the Chelandari Monastery, the monks Sabbas and Symeon, originally of the Vatopedi Monastery, erected other buildings as well as fortifications. A little later they requested

and received the *kelli* of Milea, where the two monks founded the Chelandari Monastery. The close and warm relationship between the two monasteries dates from this time. The monks of the one are present each year at the feast-day of the other, and when a new hegumen is elected and visits the other monastery for the first time, he receives, as a gift from his host, an abbatial staff and a pectoral cross.

In 1203, during the 4th Crusade, the Franks conquered Byzantium and, in the time of Andronicus II (1282-1328) their Catalan mercenaries pillaged the monasteries of Mt. Athos, encouraged by the Patriarch, John Bekkus, who was an advocate of the union of the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches, and who was very much hated on Mt. Athos.

The Vatopedi Monastery did not escape these predatory raids and was very nearly completely destroyed. However, shortly afterwards, Andronicus tried to heal the wounds he himself had inflicted and, in 1292, granted large sums of money for the restoration of the monastery, which he now led to a new period of prosperity.

Lazar I, who ruled Serbia in the 14th century, was one of the later benefactors of the monastery. The most precious among his gifts was the Virgin's Girdle (bequeathed, it is said, to the Apostles before her Dormition) which constituted the most sacred relic of the church of St. Sophia. Among the benefactors of Vatopedi were also the ruler of Moldavia, Stephen the Great (1457-1504) and the dukes of the Danube States.

The fact that the king of Sicily, Alfonso, was

The katholikon and a chapel in the Monastery courtyard, amid the orange trres in blossom.

obliged to expressly outlaw piracy in a chrysobull, and impose terrible punishments on the transgressors, conveys an idea of the tribulations suffered by the Holy Mountain. The edifices which give Vatopedi, to this day, its characteristic appearance, date from the period of building development in the early 18th century, and their construction was made possible thanks, largely, to the donations of the patriarchs Cyprian of Constantinople and Gerasimos II of Alexandria. Soon after the period of the Turkish occupation, however, began the decline of Vatopedi. The monastery was forced to sell much of the property it possessed in Greece proper and in the neighbouring countries, so as to guarantee at least the very frugal livelihood of its monks.

In 1743 a new period of prosperity began, due mainly to the foundation, near the monastery, of the Athonite School, which became the most famous school of the Holy Mountain. During this period, the Russian tsars donated large sums of money and contributed also in this way to the prosperity of the monastery, which continued to flourish up to the early 19th century, until the beginning of the Greek War of Independence.

The spacious courtyard of the Vatopedi Monastery very much resembles the main square of a small medieval town. Apart from the imposing Katholikon and the Refectory, numerous chapels form recesses and small courtyards. Water gushes from marble fountains that date from various periods, and stairways and arched porticoes lead to the entrances of the variously-coloured edifices. The dome of the Katholikon rests on four columns made of Ravenna porphyry, and the Byzantine mosaics on the walls of the church constitute rare and precious works of art.

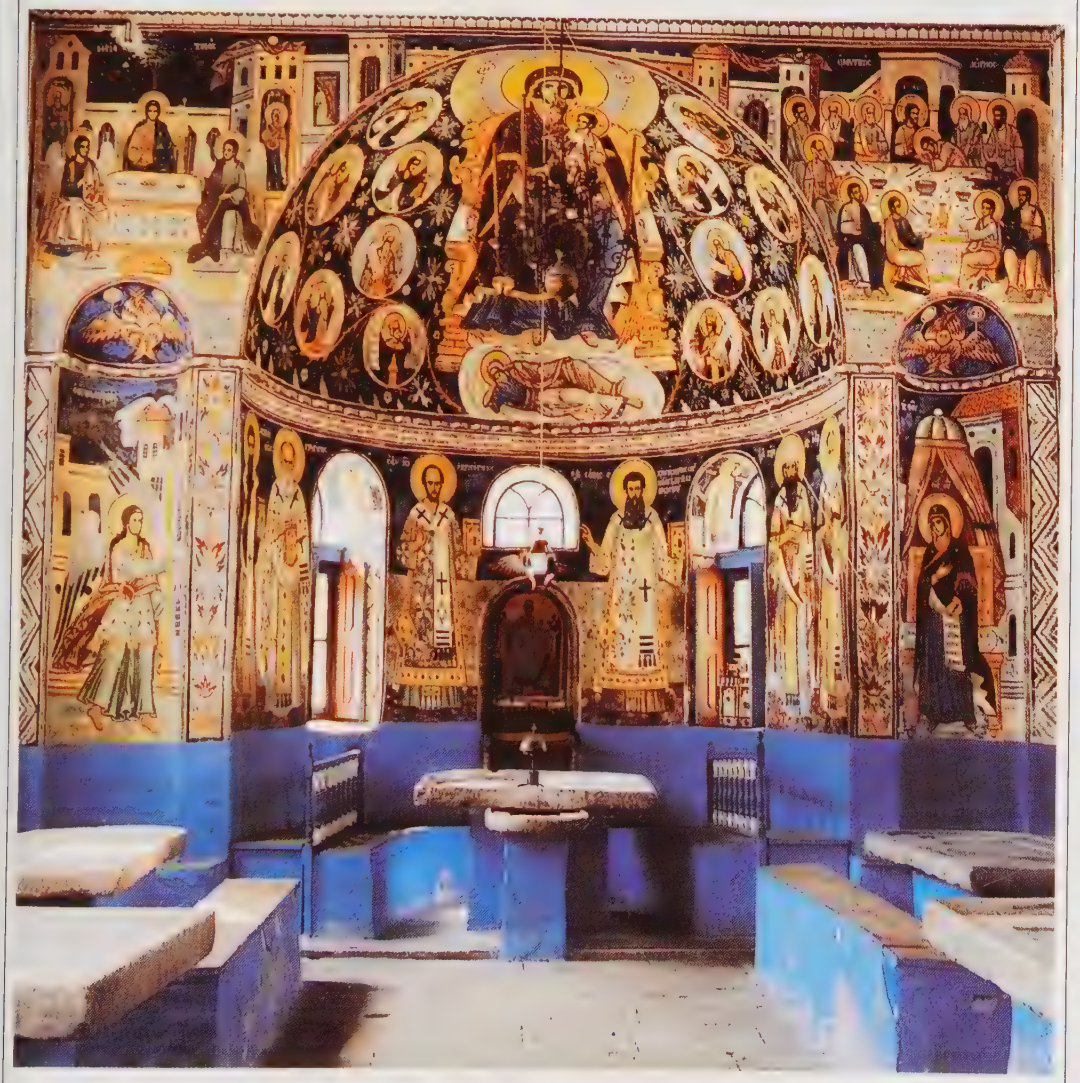
Today only a few traces remain of these mosaics, which were among the most remarkable of the Byzantine period and which covered, with their impressive splendour, the whole of the interior of the church - the tympanum of the entrance to the narthex, for instance, where a Deesis on a gold ground can still be seen. The murals in the interior of the church and the narthex are attributed to artists of the Macedonian School; dating from the 14th century, they are among the oldest and most noteworthy wall paintings on the Holy Mountain. They were commissioned by the emperor Andronicus II and include representations of scenes from the life of the Virgin and a painting of the Second Coming. Later, in 1739 and 1819, these wall paintings were painted over, but the original work can be seen quite distinctly in certain places. In keeping with the high artistic quality of the church as a whole is the *opus sectile* floor.

Opposite the Katholikon, in the 12th-century Refectory with its three apses and its murals dating to 1786, are still preserved

the old greyish-white porphyry tables, which have been destroyed in almost all the other monasteries by the vandalism of pirates or by the Turkish conquerors. Under the eaves of the tower of the Katholikon is set a large clock and, beside it, an exotic male figure in Turkish dress, the "Negro", who strikes the bell with a hammer and rings the hours. The free-standing belfry dates from 1427.

Almost incorporated into the narthex of the Katholikon is the *phiale* with its elegant canopy, supported by slender marble columns. The interior of the canopy's dome was adorned in 1810 with murals representing the Baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan, and the Pentecost.

Apart from these priceless works of art, the monastery library and sacristy also contain many other treasures. Besides the 2000 manuscripts, among which are 625 codices on richly illuminated vellum and 25,000 printed books, some of the oldest and most valu-



In the Refectory, richly adorned with wall paintings, the medieval marble tables are still preserved.

Murals of the Macedonian School, painted in 1312, and painted over in 1819. From the exonarthex of the Vatopedi Monastery.

able existing maps – the maps of Ptolemy, drawn by Strabo – belong to the Vatopedi monastery. Among the precious relics in the treasury there are, besides the Virgin's Girdle, fragments of the True Cross and a section of the reed on which was fixed the sponge dipped in vinegar, which was offered to Jesus on the Cross. Among the treasures of the monastery is the Jasper, a precious cup which, according to the inscription engraved upon on it, was a gift from Manuel Cantacuzenus Palaeologus of Mystras (1349-1380), and which is believed to work miracles.

Of the five miracle-working icons of the Vatopedi monastery - the Virgin Paramythia, the Virgin Antiphonitria, the Virgin Ktitorissa, the Virgin Esphagmeni and the Virgin Bematarissa – the latter, dating from the 9th or 10th century, is the one most deeply revered in the monastery. Its feast-day is celebrated on 21 January, although the monastery itself celebrates its feast day on 25 March, since it is dedicated to the Annunciation.

The skete of Saint Andrew, which is very near Karyes, and the skete of Saint Demetrius, which is half an hour's walk away, towards the interior of the promontory, belong to the Vatopedi Monastery.

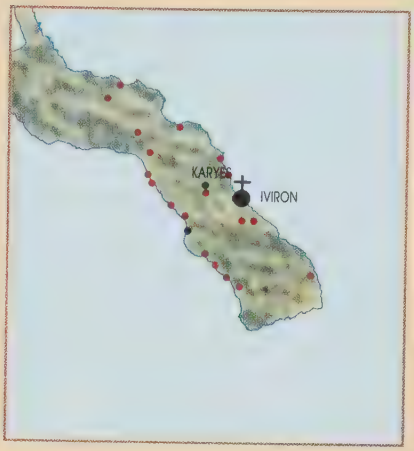
pp. 66-67: ***General view of the Monastery of Iviron.***

Epitaphios (17th c.)

Holy Chalice (Jasper) 14th c.

Reliquary (1400)

St. Demetrius (1300 - Workshop of Panselinos)



MONASTERY OF IVIRON

MONASTERY OF IVIRON

The Monastery of Iviron is situated by the mouth of a dry river bed that meets the sea where the narrow and dusty dirt road winds down to the eastern shores of the peninsula, seven kilometres away from the capital of Karyes.

The name of the Monastery is derived from ancient Iberia, the name of the homeland of its founder - the area known as Georgia today. The founder of the monastery, John Thornic, was a nobleman and a general at the court of the king of Iberia, David. His military career had brought him a colossal fortune. After several expeditions in the service of King David, he forsook the world and, together with his son Euthymios, set off in 975 for the Monastery of the Great Lavra, in order to become a follower of Athanasius, whom he admired and revered as a saint. At the same time, in Constantinople, the two princes, Basil II (976-1025) and Constantine VIII, sons of Theophano by her first marriage to Romanus II, had come of age and were officially recognized as heirs to the throne. When the general, Bardas Scleros, tried to take over the throne by fomenting a rebellion against the two young emperors who initially reigned jointly, Basil called to his aid the famous and distinguished general John Thornic, who left the monastery and routed the rebellious general at the battle of Pankaleia, in 979. The emperor richly rewarded Thornic, who returned once again as a monk to the Holy Mountain. As had been agreed, Thornic

was also granted the land around the small lavra of St. Clement, where the Monastery of Iviron stands today.

With the blessing of his spiritual advisor, Athanasius, and the help of a monk by the name of John Varasvatzes and his son Euthymios, who later became the first hegumen of the monastery, Thornic laid the foundations for the main monastery in the small monastic settlement. A monk by the name of John Varasvatzes does indeed appear as the hegumen of the monastery in 1030, but there is no evidence that he was indeed one of the founders.

From the start, the Greek monks of the other monasteries gave the name "Iviron" to this monastery, and this it has retained to this day, although in 1377 there were so few Georgians living in the monastery that Patriarch Callistus II was obliged to hand over the administration of the monastery to the Greek monks.

The period of reconstruction and prosperity of the Iviron monastery, which had been lavishly endowed by the Byzantine emperors, was followed by a period of decline, until the time when Byzantine emperors such as John Cantacuzenus and John Palaeologus, and Serbian kings such as Stephen Dushan (1331-1355), but also the ruler of Georgia, Georgan, and his descendants, began to bestow munificent gifts upon the monastery, thus assuring its livelihood.

In the mid-17th century, the daughter of Alexius, the Tsar of Russia, was healed of a very grave illness, thanks to a duplicate of the icon of the Virgin Portaitissa

A monk on the beach between the monasteries of Iviron and the Great Lavra.

which, at the request of the Tsar, was painted, blessed, and taken to Russia.

In thanksgiving, the Tsar granted to the Iviron Monastery, in 1648, the Monastery of Saint Nicholas, one of the grandest of Muscovite monasteries, which remained in Iviron's possession until 1932.

These material riches however, did not only offer the monastery immense financial resources to cover the cost of repairs after the destruction caused by fires in 1845 and 1865, but also made it the object of severe reprisals on the part of the Turkish conquerors, because of the aid the monks of Iviron had offered to the other monasteries during the Greek War of Independence.

The last monk of the small Iberian brotherhood died in 1955.

The Katholikon, built in 1030 and restored in 1513, is dedicated to the Dormition of the Virgin (15 August). It has an *opus sectile* floor, while the apses of the transept are adorned with several rows of plates of Nicaean (Iznik) faïence.

Besides the murals, which date from 1592 but were painted over in later years, and the elaborate iconostasis, with its carved floral representations, particularly notable are the masterpieces of artistic metalwork, such as a silver Russian candelabrum in the shape of a tree, dating from the 18th century, three heavy chandeliers, and an iron railing. On the floor of the church, the following inscription can be read: "*I have made these columns to stand firm, and they will not be moved to all eternity, Gregory, the Iberian, monk and founder*".

Between the Katholikon and the main entrance to the monastery stands a chapel holding Iviron's most important icon, the Virgin Portaitissa. At the time of the bitter iconoclastic controversy, during the reign of the emperor Theophilus in the 9th century, the owner of the icon, who lived in Nicaea, dropped it into the sea to save it from destruction. The icon floated to the shores of the Holy Mountain, where it was found by the hermit monk Gabriel, from Georgia. After the monk's death, the hegumen of the Iviron monastery brought the icon to the monastery for safekeeping, and placed it in the Sanctuary of the church. The icon disappeared from there, however, and reappeared above the main gate of the monastery. It was brought back three times, and three times it disappeared, to appear again at the same spot. One day, a voice from heaven was heard, saying to the monks: "*I did not come to you to be protected, but to protect*". The monks then built, near the gate, a chapel in honour of the icon, which is covered in a silver and gold casing, encrusted with precious stones. Numerous votive offerings surround it, and it has been revered, in this place, ever since.

The rich collection of books in the library, opposite the Katholikon, includes, apart

from 2000 manuscripts - among which 123 on vellum - another 5000 printed volumes, as well as many illuminated codices such as, for instance, codex no.5 of the Iviron monastery, a precious Evangelistarion dating from the 13th century. Also preserved here are precious Georgian manuscripts and, in particular, an illuminated codex of John Damascene, dating from the 13th century, which contains the epic poem of Barlaam and Jesaphet. It tells of the life of Jesaphet, the son of an Indian prince, who was so deeply stirred by the hermit Barlaam's preaching that he became a Christian.

Innumerable are the treasures which are kept in the sacristy, which is one of the most important on Mt. Athos. Among these are the elaborately embroidered vestments of patriarch Dionysius IV and the mantle of Gregory V.

A special treasure is the veil of the Sanctuary Gate, which depicts the Dormition of the Virgin. It was embroidered by the

The lilttle church of the Holy Virgin and the Spring gushing "Holy Water" before the Monastery, near the beach.

The chapel with the Monastery's most important icon, that of the Virgin Portaïtissa.

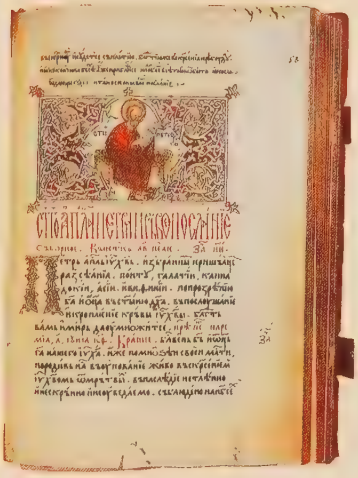
celebrated seamstress Kokkona Orologa. Most impressive also are the silver lamp in the shape of a lemon tree with 3 gilded lemons - offered by pious Muscovites in 1818 - many superb gold-embroidered vestments and a mantle called the "sakkos of Tzimisces". This mantle, embroidered with the representations of ten lions and four Byzantine double-headed eagles framed by arabesque designs, was probably the vestment of a 15th-century prelate. Here are kept also many documents, sealed with precious seals. However, much more valuable in the eyes of the monks than these treasures are the holy relics of honoured martyrs and fathers of the Church, preserved in silver and gold reliquaries.

There are 16 chapels within the monastery compound. In one of these are kept the holy relics of 150 Saints, and parts of the tools which were used to crucify Christ. Under the jurisdiction of the Iviron Monastery are six *kathismata* and twenty-six *kellia*, of which sixteen are in Karyes. The Iberian (Georgian) skete of St. John the Baptist (Prodrome) is situated half an hour's distance away to the west of the monastery.

Partial view of the Monastery from the sea.

pp. 76-77. ***General view of the Monastery of Iviron.***

MONASTERY OF CHELANDARI



MONASTERY OF CHELANDARI

The Monastery of Chelandari is built at a distance of about five kilometres from its little port, in a verdant valley on the northeastern side of the Athos promontory.

The origin of the Serbian monastery's name has not been historically ascertained, but its curved outlined could suggest a reference to Byzantine warships, the "Chelandia". It is, however, more probable that Chelandari took its name from the hermit monk, Gregory Chelandaris, a well-known Athonite monk who, it is conjectured, sometime around 980 built a little church and a house for himself and a few other monks on the site occupied by the monastery today.

The figures honoured as founders of the monastery in its present-day form are the Serbian prince Rastko and his father, the Grand Zhupan of Serbia, Stephen Nemanja. Already by 1191, Rastko, the successor to the throne, had come to Athos against the wishes of his parents, had taken the name of Sabbas and had become a monk in the Russian Monastery of Thessalonikeos, which is today completely destroyed. A few years later, when he himself was living in the Vatopedi Monastery, Sabbas persuaded his father to give up the throne and devote his life to God. Stephen followed his son's advice and, as Symeon, an Athonite monk, he requested permission of his son-in-law and emperor of Byzantium, Alexius III, to found a monastery. The emperor ratified the foundation of the monastery by a chrysobull, while in a second document, in the same year, he further strengthened his decree by granting the monastery to the Serbs as a "gift in perpetuity". Sabbas' brother Stephen II, who, in 1217, was crowned king of Serbia by the pope, contributed to the building of the monastery both by generous donations and

the granting of special privileges.

Almost a century later, another Serbian ruler, king Stephen V Miliutin, provided the monastery with very important funds. During the period between 1293 and 1303 the Katholikon was restored and made more splendid, as a copy of an old inscription on the church wall attests.

The close relationship between the Serbian state and Chelandari exerted such a strong influence on the architectural style of the churches of that country that, even in later years, churches in Serbia were frequently modelled on the Katholikon of Chelandari.

The monastery's spiritual and religious importance to the Serbian state continues undiminished to this day. For centuries, many bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church have come from the monastic community of the Chelandari monastery. Until the mid-16th century, a school of Serbian literature flourished here. Later, however, in the 16th and 17th century, it began to decline. Almost the entire monastery was destroyed by fire in 1722 and only the strong walls of the tower were able to withstand the fury of the blaze. The influx of novices from Moldavia and Wallachia ceased. A large part of the treasures in the monastery were saved because they were kept in the tower of St. Sabbas at Karyes.

Serbian monasticism on Athos found a great patron and benefactor in Alexander I King of Serbia. During his visit to the Holy Mountain, he had seen the ruins of the monastery, which had been destroyed five years earlier, and had only found Bulgarian-speaking monks there. On his return home, he arranged for the buildings to be restored and sent eminent monks from Serbia to work on the spiritual revival of the monastery, which has continued to flourish ever since. It was then that the monastic complex took on the general appearance that it presents today: that of a disparate assembly of buildings erected at various times. In spite of this - or rather, because of this - the variety of buildings produces a pleasant feeling of unity and architectural perfection. In 1913 the *Protepistatis* was requested by Chelandari to offer all possible assistance to the Greek struggle for freedom and towards the incorporation of Mt. Athos into the Greek State.

The Virgin has been revered as Abbess ever since the time when the monks

The Katholikon and the Phiale from the entrance to the Monastery.

attempted to set the icon of the Virgin "Tricheroussa" in the iconostasis of the Katholikon, and the icon kept disappearing and reappearing again on the hegumen's throne. The miracle happened three times, after which the monks deferred to her wish and reverently ceded to their "Abbess" the position she claimed.

The murals of the Katholikon, for which a dating to 1319 or 1320, that is during the time of the founder Miliutin, has been suggested, were painted over in 1803. However, the old Byzantine murals are still perceptible underneath the layers of colour that were added later. Behind the hegumen's throne lies the grave of St. Symeon, who lived in the monastery until his death. St. Sabbas, his son, was later ordained archbishop and left Athos. From St. Symeon's tomb one day sprang forth a vine, which still bears fruit, supposed to bring fertility to barren women. Even now, many women ask the monks to send them dried grapes from this vine.

In the old Refectory, murals dating from 1629 are preserved; these, however, cover the older, 14th-century wall paintings. The library contains a great number of manuscripts, over 400 seals and documents, among which are also found the chrysobulls of Byzantine emperors, as well as an important collection of books of Serbian literature of the past centuries. Among the 181 Greek and 809 Slav codices, there are, apart from 47 manuscripts on parchment,

The solemn procession at Easter.

some very ancient scrolls, seven of which are in Greek and five in the Slavonic language.

Among the treasures and votive offerings there are five precious stones with 12th-century engravings of the Virgin, of Christ and of Saint Demetrius; also carved wooden crosses containing fragments of the True Cross. Many of the relics, the icons, and rich vestments are gifts of Serb rulers and Russian Tsars. The Monastery is dedicated to the Presentation of the Virgin, celebrated on 21 November.

Thirteen chapels, most of them decorated with magnificent murals, belong to Chelandari, while, a few years ago, some very fine old murals were discovered in one of the monastery's *Kellia*.

Aer – The cloth covering the Euchraristic chalice – showing the Communion of the Apostles.

"Praxapostolos" – a liturgical book containing extracts from the Acts and the Epistles, 17th c.

One of the superb murals of the Chelandari Monastery is this painting of the Virgin discovered in the kelli of the Transfiguration, dated to 1260.

pp. 86-87: ***A moment of intense solemnity and deep devotion during the Resurrection service at Chelandari.***

MONASTERY OF DIONYSIOU

The Monastery of Dionysiou seen from the road leading to Grigoriou. In the background, the harbour of the Monastery of St. Paul.

MONASTERY OF DIONYSIOU

On the southern side of the promontory, on the western shore, atop a steep rock which rises to a height of 50 metres, stands the Monastery of Dionysiou. Tradition has it that Dionysius from Coryssos had grouped some monks around him on this rock and that he later retreated to a cave a little higher up. One night a glow appeared in the sky, "*light from the light eternal*" which shone for a long time above the rock; Dionysius interpreted this heavenly sign as a command to found a monastery.

With Dionysius came his brother Theodosius to be a monk on Athos. While Dionysius went into retreat and lived on the rock as a hermit monk, his brother joined the community of the Monastery of Philotheou. Theodosius later came to the imperial court, rose in office rapidly, became the spiritual father of the emperor Alexius III Comnenus and was ordained Metropolitan Bishop of Trebizond. In 1347, Theodosius persuaded the emperor to recognize the foundation of the monastery of Dionysiou and ratify this decision by a chrysobull. This exquisitely decorated document, adorned with miniatures representing Alexius Comnenus, emperor of Trebizond, his wife Theodora and St. John the Baptist, not only ratified

An ancient font in the narrow courtyard, set in the wall of the Monastery church.

the disbursement of the sum granted for the erection of the monastery, but also ordered the payment of a considerable annual subsidy in return for the renaming of the monastery as Monastery of the Great Comnenus. Later benefactors of the monastery were the Palaeologan emperors John and Constantine, but the fall of Constantinople in 1453 put an abrupt stop to the grants.

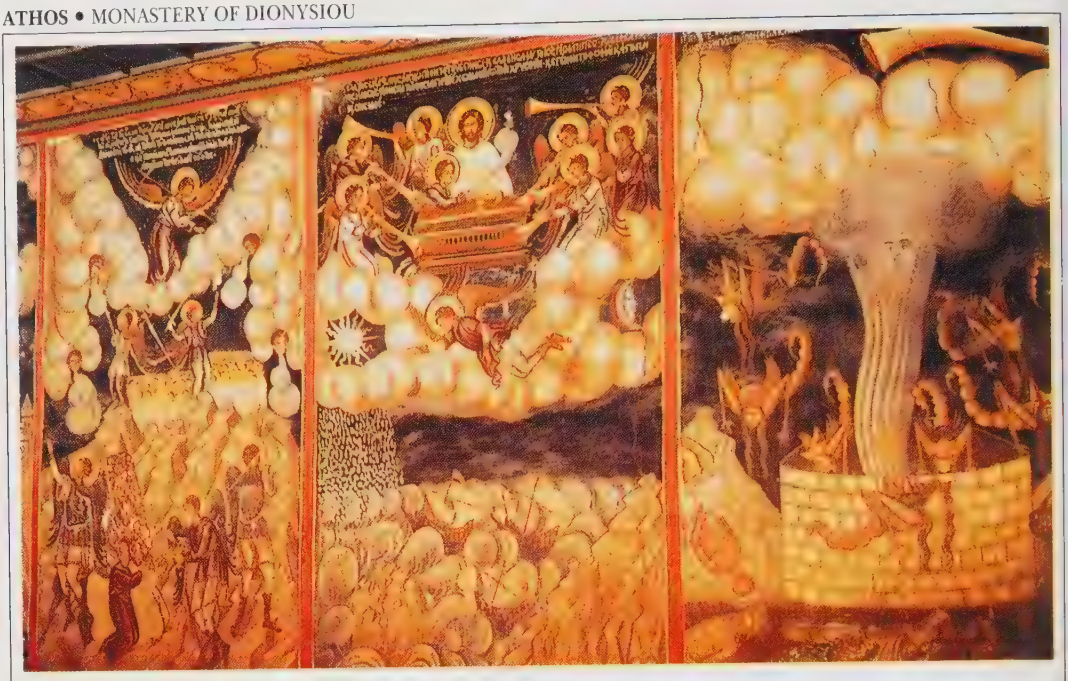
The Byzantine benefactors were succeeded by the rulers of Wallachia and Moldavia. The names of Radul and Neagu (1512-1521) who provided the funds necessary for the construction of the fortified tower and of the aqueduct, are particularly mentioned.

In October 1535 a terrible fire burnt down almost all the buildings of the monastery except the Tower, which was better equipped to withstand this catastrophe. Once again the rulers of Wallachia and Moldavia manifested their interest by ensuring the reconstruction of the eastern wing of the monastery complex, which included the kitchen, the wine cellar, and other auxiliary areas. The Grand Duke Peter IV laid the foundations of the new Katholikon, while the Duke Alexander IV and his wife Roxandra, daughter of Peter, assumed the costs of the reconstruction of the Refectory (1568) and of a six-storeyed edifice on the seaward side, the picturesque balconies and covered passages of which to this day give the monastery its characteristic appearance. The part of the complex extending towards the garden is attributed to the brothers Lazarus and Boris from Piavista. To these benefactors may be added

The walls of the formal parlour situated in front of the Refectory, near the Katholikon, are adorned with a series of paintings of the Apocalypse, which constitute perhaps the most impressive complete depiction of this cycle.

the bishops Macarius and Jeremiah who lived in the monastery until their death and bequeathed to it their considerable property.
After the great fire of 1535, the Katholikon was built (1537-1547) in the narrow courtyard of the monastery, and decorated with marvellous murals, which are attributed to one of the main representatives of the Cretan School, Zorzis. A *Typikon* of 1634 records that the wall paintings of the monastery of Dionysiou were executed by the outstanding painter, "Master Zorzis the Cretan".
The murals of the narthex are of a later date and were painted by a Rumanian artist. The very impressive iconostasis is entirely covered with pure gold leaf and is among the most notable of Athos. In this iconostasis are set the most important icons of the Monastery, among which are five icons of the Great Deesis, by the famed Cretan painter, Euphrosynos (1542).
However, the most important icon of the monastery is kept in the chapel of the Akathistos, and is the Virgin of the Akathistos, which is ascribed to the Evangelist Luke. During the siege of Constantinople by the Avars in 626, Patriarch Sergius carried the icon around the walls of the city and showed it to the besieged to encourage them. The Akathistos Hymn, which was composed by Sergius himself, is today sung daily before the icon.
Between the Katholikon and the Refectory, with its exquisite murals of the "Asomatoi" and the Ladder to Heaven, there is a portico with wall paintings depicting scenes of the Apocalypse which are among the most im-

The paintings on the Refectory wall have been attributed to the monks Mercurios and Daniel, who created the cycle of the Second Coming in 1603.



Wall paintings, between the Katholikon and the Refectory, depicting scenes of the Apocalypse.

pressive and famous wall paintings of the Athonite monasteries. A carved wooden door with representations of mythical animals leads to the Refectory.

In the sacristy are kept treasures many centuries old, such as a relief ivory plaque with scenes of the Crucifixion, gold crosses, chalices, Gospels, and a liturgical New Testament dating from 1201, whose binding is very finely decorated with enamel.

The library contains approximately 1100 manuscripts and 27 scrolls, as well as over 5,000 incunabula, numerous 16th-century dictionaries, and Alexius' magnificent illuminated chrysobull, ratifying the foundation of the monastery.

Some of the Gospels have particularly beautiful and elaborate bindings. Such a one is the 13th-century Tetraevangelon, bound in an exquisitely carved wooden cover fashioned with incredible delicacy. Among the holy relics are the right hand of Saint John the Baptist, as well as a segment of the iron chains with which Peter had been chained when in Rome. In the crypt of the Katholikon are kept the relics of Niphon I, patriarch of Constantinople (1486-1489 and 1497-1498) who spent his last years in the monastery of Dionysiou without at first being recognized. He was later canonized.

pp. 94-95: In the centre of the narrow courtyard stands the Katholikon of the Monastery, with its five domes.

The cross of the Empress Helena Palæologina (15th c.).

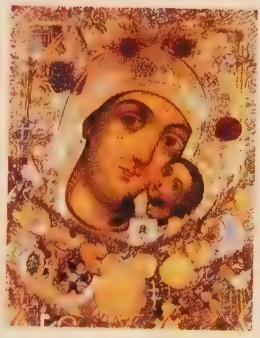
Processional fan, 1661.

Encolpion (medallion worn by a bishop), 17th c.

"Katzion" (censer), 19th c.

Encolpion, 17th c.

MONASTERY OF KOUTLOUMOUSIOU



MONASTERY OF KOUTLOUMOUSIOU

Five minutes away on foot, on the south side of the capital, stands the Koutloumousiou Monastery, on a fertile slope at an altitude of 320 metres, among vineyards and orchards.

Tradition, both written and oral, informs us that the monastery was founded by the Blessed Koutloumousis, of whom nothing else is known.

According to another view the Monastery's name is due to its possible foundation by monks from Palestine, since the name "Koutloumousi", in an ancient Arabic dialect, signifies the Transfigured Saviour, to whom the Katholikon is dedicated. The monastery's first Custodian was the emperor Alexius I Comnenus.

The first historically substantiated indication concerning the existence of the monastery dates from 1169 and comes from Isaiah, hegumen of the Koutloumousiou Monastery. What is certain, is that the monastery suffered so many attacks by pirates and robbers in the 12th and 13th centuries, as well as by Catalan mercenaries in the early years of the 14th century, that its survival hung on a very tenuous thread.

In 1344, in order to somewhat increase the monastery's income, the Protepistatis Isaac ceded to it the small, ruined monasteries of Anapafsas and Philadelphou, as well as the abandoned monasteries of Stavronikita and the Prophet Elijah. When Chariton from the island of Imbros became the hegumen of the monastery towards the end of the 14th century, the Koutloumousiou monastery

began to flourish. Chariton, one of the most outstanding hegumens of the monastery, requested the financial support of the rulers of the Danube States, of Serbia and of Bulgaria. He also asked for the help of the Greeks. Prince John Vladislav proved to be the most generous benefactor of the time, assuming almost the entire cost of the monastery's reconstruction. He also contributed greatly to the spiritual renaissance of the monastery, encouraging many monks in his territories to come here.

When Chariton was ordained metropolitan bishop of Hungary and Wallachia, he retained his position as hegumen of the monastery and supported Koutloumousiou in every possible way. Thus, in the following years, Koutloumousiou began to acquire fame and, as a result, Patriarch Antony proclaimed it a "patriarchal", *stavropegiac* monastery. Chariton managed to retain the Greek identity of the monastery, despite the fact that its revival was due to the strong influx of Rumanian monks who came to settle there.

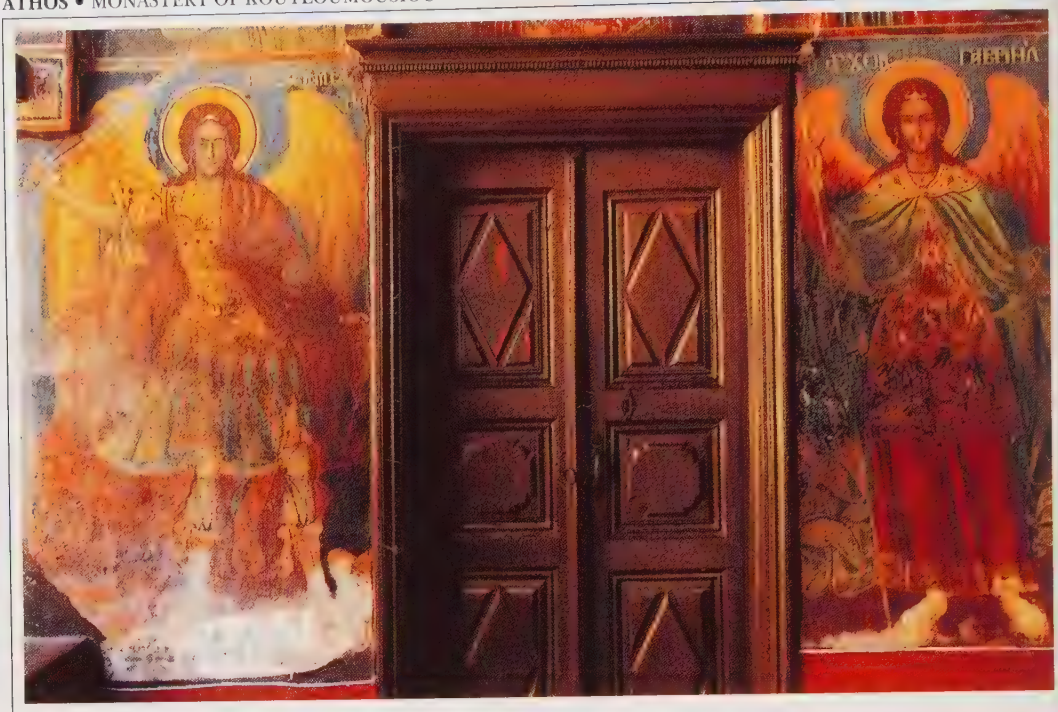
In 1497, a terrible fire broke out, with devastating results. This time, help came from the ruler of Wallachia, Radul the Great, who provided the funds for the restoration of the buildings that had been destroyed by the fire. In 1508, that same Radul financed the construction of the great tower. Help also came from the voivode Neagu, thanks to whom the restoration was completed. During the following decades, the influence of the Rumanian monks decreased con-

siderably, and the monastery, now in predominantly Greek hands, held the sixth place in the hierarchy of the Athonite monasteries, a position which it retains to this day. The financial support of the Rumanian rulers continued until 1861, when the Rumanian State was established, but prince Alexander John confiscated the entire property owned by the monastery in that country.

In the meantime, Koutloumousi had won the favour of other benefactors. Thus, when, a devastating fire destroyed the eastern wing of the monastery in 1767, the damage was once again repaired thanks to the generous assistance of the patriarch of Alexandria Matthew III, who retired to Koutloumousi as a simple monk and donated to it his entire property.

The support of Greek bishops permitted the survival of the Koutloumousiou monastery after the fires of 1857 and 1870 which, fortunately, touched neither the Katholikon nor the library and sacristy. The latest disaster of this kind occurred in 1980, when the entire east wing was consumed by flames. The edifice of the katholikon as seen today dates from 1540. The murals, painted by artists of the Cretan School, date from the same period, but they were later painted over.

Besides the 100 portable icons, particularly revered is an icon of the Virgin. Incorporated in the outer narthex is the chapel



The Archangels stand guard over the entrance to the exonarthex.

containing the miracle-working icon of the "Dreadful Protection", considered indestructible by fire, since it has survived so many blazes. It is probably of Cretan origin and, according to tradition, once, when pirates attacked the monastery, the Virgin sent an impenetrable fog which obliged the surprised attackers to beat a hasty retreat. On an interior wall, almost hidden in a niche, there is a wall painting showing the emperor Andronicus II, who was a great benefactor of the monastery. The Refectory dates from the 18th century, while the phiale and the free-standing bell tower date from the 19th century.

In the library there are 3,500 printed volumes, over 350 manuscripts and 100 richly illuminated parchments. Codex No.60, dating from 1171, presents an interesting particularity. It differs from the rest in that the traditional golden ground suggesting the "other-worldly", is here painted in very realistic deep blue tones.

In the treasury are preserved precious vestments and objects of great value, as well as relics of saints, such as those of saint Gerasimos († 1812), which survived all the fires. Eighteen kellia and 3 hermitages come under the jurisdiction of the Koutloumousiou Monastery, as does also the nearby Greek Skete of St. Panteleimon. Approximately half of the 23 kalyves of this beautiful Skete are inhabited today. Koutloumousiou is dedicated to the Transfiguration of the Lord and its feast-day is on 6 August.

pp.104-105: ***Murals above the entrance to the exonarthex.***

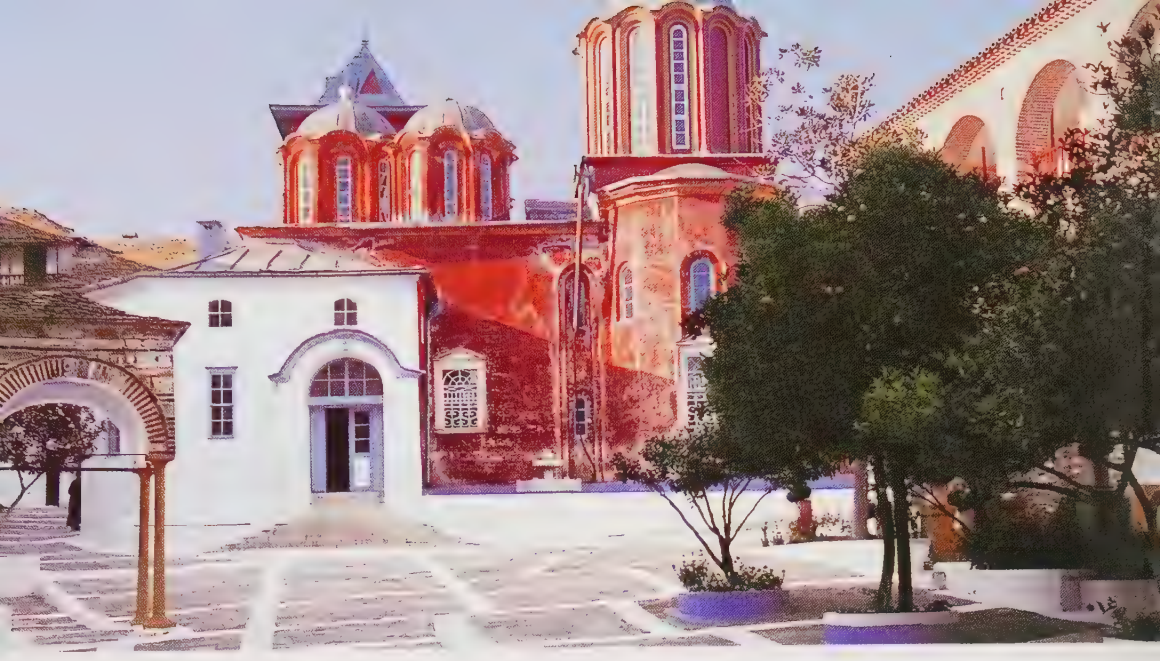
Silver-gilt Russian Chalice with engraved decoration (1850).

A printed Gospel published in Leipzig (1967), which retains its original binding.

Engraved Chalice adorned with representations of holy personages (1850).

The virgin of the Sanctuary – a miracle working icon (ca. 1750).

MONASTERY OF PANTOCRATOR



The Katholikon stands on the northern side of the paved courtyard.

MONASTERY OF PANTOCRATOR

The waves of the Strymonic gulf beat almost incessantly against the 50-metre high rocks on the eastern shores of the Athos peninsula, dominated by the Monastery of the Pantocrator, which lies to the south-west, a three-and-a-half-hours' walk away from the capital. A document signed by the patriarch of Constantinople, Callistus, confirms the date of the foundation of the monastery. Construction work was begun on the katholikon in 1357, and the building was completed a few years later, as is testified by the inscription, according to which the monastery was founded by Alexius the Stratopedarch and his brother John, the Grand Primikerios, both of whom intended to become monks and to spend the rest of their lives in the monastery. The construction work was completed in 1363.

The emperor John V Palaeologus, a relative of the founders, granted considerable sums of money to Alexius and John, and these grants were continued by his successors. An inscription, which mentioned a possible third founder before 1536, the Grand Logothete of Hungary-Wallachia, Stanlu, was removed in 1847 from the narthex of the katholikon when the building underwent modifications. Just twenty years after the completion of the construction works, in 1390, the Monastery of the Pantocrator was destroyed by fire, but was rebuilt thanks to the generous help of the founders, of the emperor Manuel II Palaeologus (1391-1425) and of Patriarch Anthony IV (1389-1390).

At that time the smaller monasteries of Fakinou, Falakrou, Soritis and Aghiou Dimitriou – which continues to exist as a Skete – came under the jurisdiction of the Pantocrator Monastery.

After the fall of Constantinople, the Rumanian rulers initially supported the monastery. After the tribulations it suffered at the hands of the Turkish conquerors in the 15th century, a period of great prosperity began in the 16th century, thanks to the generous assistance of the rulers of Wallachia. The position it holds today of seventh in rank in the hierarchy of the Athonite monasteries dates from that time. The most important of the Pantocrator's benefactors in the 18th century (1716-1719) was the Phanariot Greek, John Mavrocordatos . Catherine the Great of Russia also expressed her support by granting permission to the Pantocrator's monks to raise funds on her territories. A disastrous fire in 1773 once again destroyed almost the entire complex and once again reconstruction was made possible thanks to the tremendous efforts of the monk and treasurer, Cyril. After the two World Wars, another fire broke out which razed the north wing of the Pantocrator. The buildings have now been restored by the Greek Department of Restoration of Antiquities.

The katholikon of the monastery of the Pantocrator is the smallest on the Holy Mountain. The older murals, dating from 1538, were painted over by Matthaios Ioannes of Naoussa; there are, however, fragments of older paintings such as a Deesis and a Dormition of the Virgin and several icons of

The incomparable view towards the south from the reception pavilion. In the background, the last rays of the setting sun illuminate the summit of Mt. Athos. Just visible in the centre of the photograph, the Monastery of Stavronikita.

The Tower on the beach between the monasteries of Stavronikita and Pantocrator.

Saints which have been preserved to our day. Besides the tombs of the founders of the monastery, the katholikon also contains a very fine iconostasis dating from the period between 1622-1640.

In the building alterations which took place in 1847, the two narthexes were joined into one large esonarthex, to which was added a new glass-enclosed exonarthex.

The Refectory, dating from 1741, is incorporated into the wing containing the monks' cells, opposite the katholikon; its murals were painted in 1749. The building was extended in 1866. Many of the most valuable books and manuscripts in the library were thankfully preserved from the fires. Today the collection includes 3,500 printed works, two scrolls and almost 350 codices. Some of the 70 or so parchments it contains are exquisite works of art. Special mention must be made of codex no. 61, an illuminated 9th-century psalter, as well as the silver-bound codex no. 234. Although its dimensions are 17 x 12.4 cm., it contains 547 pages of fine vellum, and the minuscule writing of the illuminated text measures only a millimetre, so that a magnifying glass is necessary in order to read it.

In the treasury there are fragments of the shield of Saint Mercurius, miracle-working icons, fragments of the True Cross, gold-embroidered altar-cloths and sacred relics, such as those of the two miracle-working saints, Cosmas and Damian, and many others.

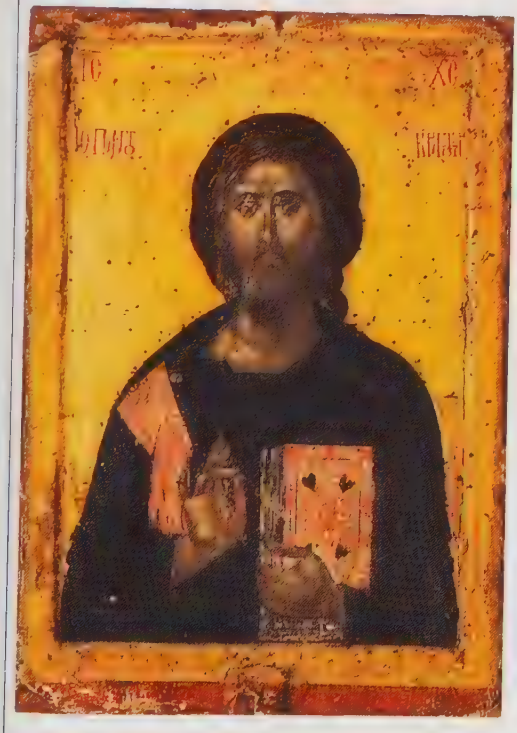
The icon which is revered above all others in the Monastery of the Pantocrator is that of the Virgin Gerondissa. It is said that, many years ago, during a service, this icon, ordered the officiating priest to shorten the ritual so that the dying hegumen might receive the Sacraments.

The Russian skete of the Prophet Elijah, situated on a wooded slope above the monastery, belongs to the Pantocrator. The well-known Russian reformer and monk, Paisios Veltsovski, came to live here in 1757. In the following years the Skete kept being extended, thus causing friction with the monastery. The patriarch, Neophytus II, ended the dispute by issuing a decree by which the Skete was finally ceded to the monastery. Another 16 kellia and 30 kalyves also belong to the monastery, which is dedicated to the Transfiguration and celebrates its feast-day on 6 August.

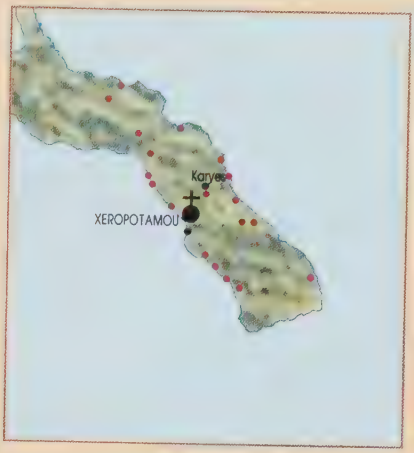
pp. 114-115: ***View of Pantocrator.***

Processional fan, 18th c.

Cross from an iconostasis, 1600.



Double-sided icon depicting Christ Pantocrator and St. Athanasius, 14 th c.



MONASTERY OF XEROPOTAMOU

The garden and, on the right, the church of the Holy Cross by the monastery portal.

MONASTERY OF XEROPOTAMOU

Only half an hour's walk away from Daphne, on the narrow, 11-kilometres- long dirt road joining the port to Karyes, we find the Monastery of Xeropotamou, built at a height of 200 metres on a gentle slope which runs down to the western shore of the peninsula.

Tradition attributes the founding of the monastery to the empress Pulcheria (399-453), wife of the emperor Marcianus, or to the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913-959) or yet again to Romanus I Lecapinus. However, the most plausible account relates that it was built at the end of the 10th century, only a few years after the Monastery of the Great Lavra, by the monk Paul Xeropotaminos. This monk, who was also the first hegumen of the monastery, was one of the outstanding spiritual personalities of the time - as was his contemporary Athanasius the Athonite - and was one of the signatories of the first Typikon of Mt. Athos, the "*Tragos*."

Standing on a height next to the bed of the Xeropotamos (or "dry river"), which in the winter or after heavy storms swells dangerously, the monastery flourished in the 11th century, thanks to funds provided by the Byzantine emperors, and became one of the most beautiful and richest of the monasteries. This prosperity lasted until the beginning of the 13th century, except for the intervals during which the monastery suffered serious damage from earthquakes, pillage by pirates and Saracens or looting by Catalan merce-

naries. After the reconquest of Constantinople by the Byzantines, the monastery was granted financial assistance by the emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus (1259-1328), as is recorded in a chrysobull, known as Michael's "*chrysoboulos logos*" ("gold-sealed word"). According to tradition, the emperor actually visited the monastery in person. When, in 1280, almost all the edifices of the monastery were devoured by flames, another emperor, Andronicus II Paleologus (1282-1328) provided the financial resources for its reconstruction and made important donations. Because of this he was counted among the new founders of the monastery.

In the 14th and 15th centuries, the rulers of Serbia donated large sums of money to the monastery; these were used to build high defensive walls and a tower that could withstand a fire. In 1445 the Katholikon was rebuilt from the beginning, but another disastrous fire broke out again during the Turkish occupation (1507).

The terrible damage caused by this fire was repaired thanks to the efforts of the monks themselves and to the financial assistance of the sultan,Selim I (†1520). The story goes that during a visit to Egypt, Selim dreamt, one night, that his army was surrounded by a number of handsome youths who told him that his house (the Ottoman dynasty), would gain mastery over a huge empire, on condition that he show himself

generous to a monk who would soon present himself and make some request. The sultan, surprised and uneasy, discussed his vision the next morning with his ministers and discovered that all of them had had similiar dreams the night before. When he asked one of his Christian soldiers to interpret his dream, he was told of the terrible devastation which had been suffered by the Xeropotamou monastery on Athos. The sultan showered Xeropotamou and all the other monasteries on Athos with lavish gifts and decreed, by a document known as the "Hati Sherif" or "Sacred Ordinance", that the Holy Mountain was thenceforth to be under his personal protection.

The terrible destruction caused by another fire that broke out in 1609 was repaired thanks to the aid of the Rumanian rulers. At that time, Xeropotamou had risen from the ninth to the eighth place in the Athonite hierarchy, a rank which it retains to this day. However, as the years went by, the monastery lost much of its landed property. After 1760 the monastery flourished once again for a time, when the Ecumenical Patriarchs Timotheus II (1612-1620) and Methodius I (1668-1671) offered fi-

The blue tiles and the plates set in the courtyard walls create a pleasant contrast with the red bricks.

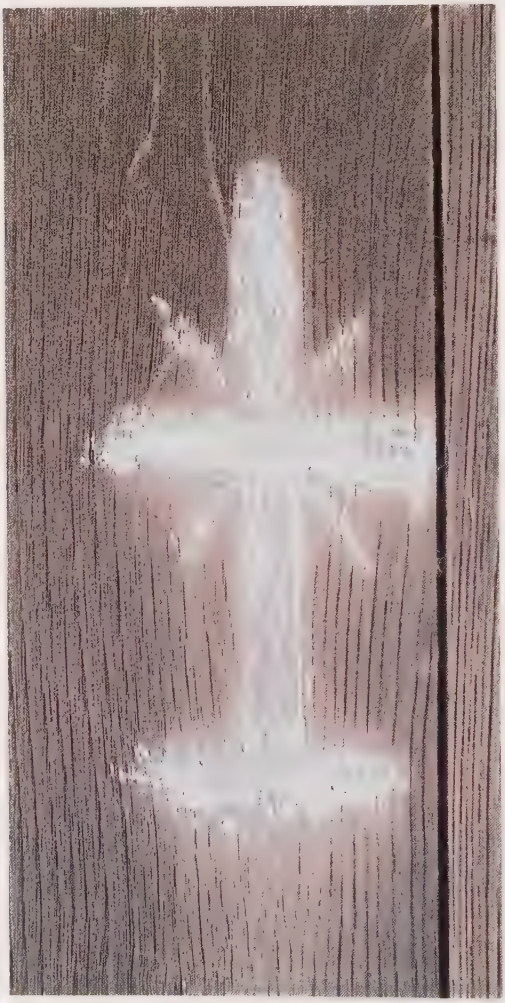
nancial assistance in the form of important grants. However, a more substantial contribution was made by the Greek poet and scholar, Caesarius Daponte, who, before he became a monk, was ambassador to the court of the Phanariot hospodars of Moldavia, Constantine and John Mavrocordatos. On his numerous journeys Daponte was able to raise considerable sums for the monastery of Xeropotamou and the monastic community managed to still have large amounts of money at its disposal, even after the restoration of the edifices and the construction of the great tower. Daponte's method for collecting money, which consisted in presenting holy relics and fragments of the True Cross for veneration during his travels, was later copied by others, in their effort to raise the funds necessary for the repeated repairs needed by the monastery.

The walls of the Katholikon, which was built between 1761 and 1763 with the help of Daponte, were painted in 1783 by the artists Constantinos, Athanasios and Naoum from Korytsa. In spite of the fact that they are relatively recent, these wall paintings are of superlative quality. In the Katho-

The western side of the Xeropotamou Monastery seen from the guest pavilion.

likon, engraved beside the double-headed eagle, there is an inscription composed by Daponte in the 18th century, which refers to the year 6438 from the creation of the world, a date that corresponds to the year 930 according to our system of calculation. Besides the superbly carved wooden iconostasis, there are 200 portable icons in the church. The phiale of porphyry, which is in the courtyard next to the katholikon, was built during the period of Daponte (1783).

The murals of the Refectory, which was erected with funds provided by the hospodar of Wallachia, Alexander, were painted in the mid-19th century by the artists Sophronius and Nicephorus from the Skete of St. Anne. Fortunately, the books, the relics of the saints and other treasures belonging to the monastery escaped undamaged from the catastrophic fires that repeatedly devastated the monastery. The latest fires broke out in 1952 and 1974, and the damage suffered by the south-west wing during the last one have yet to be repaired. In the library housed over the narthex are preserved 409 manuscripts, among which 20 manuscripts on vellum, and over 4,000 printed books and incunabula.



In the monastery's treasury is kept the largest known fragment of the True Cross. Apart from this holiest of relics, the most valuable work of art is without a doubt the ophite paten of Pulcheria, a gift of the empress herself. It measures 15 cm in diameter and has been very finely engraved on the inside with a depiction of 15 figures around the main scene of the Preparation of the Throne. Here are also to be found the holy relics of the "Forty Martyrs", as well as some amber croziers and several gold-embroidered vestments and liturgical vessels.

The Xeropotamou monastery, dedicated to the Forty Martyrs, celebrates its feast day on 9 March. Four kellia and most of the buildings of the port of Daphne belong to the monastery.

pp. 124-125: ***Exterior view of Xeropotamou.***

Decree of Andronicus II Palaeologus (1295).

Breviary (1698).

Embroidered phaelonion with the tree of Jesse. 18th c.

The paten of Pulcheria. 14th c.

MONASTERY OF ZOGRAPHOU

MONASTERY OF ZOGRAPHOU

In the heart of the northern part of the Athos peninsula lies a verdant valley stretching inland from the western coast and branching out into three smaller valleys rising up into the hills. On this spot and in the woods is situated the Bulgarian monastery of Zographou, at a height of 180 m. Taking the path to the right, the walker might get to Chelandari in two hours and if he chose to continue straight on, it would take him another two hours to come to the Monastery of Esphigmenou, on the eastern coast of the promontory.

The monastery's advantageous position saved it repeatedly from destruction. The keeper of the port was usually able to warn the monastery in time when pirates or other raiders were seen approaching. Often, however, the attackers were able to trick him or even to kill him. They could then approach the monastery without any trouble and plunder it.

As regards the foundation, but also the name of the monastery, tradition has it that it was founded by three brothers and monks, Moses, Aaron and John from Ochrid, who could not agree on the choice of a patron saint for their newly-founded monastery. To resolve the question, they locked a wooden panel in the Katholikon, and prayed that they might be sent some heavenly sign. That same night, many miles away from Athos, the Saracens attacked and pillaged the Monastery of Phanuel in Palestine, and the icon of St. George was

in danger of being destroyed. A miracle took place, and the next morning the monks, who were praying for the heavenly sign, discovered in their church the icon of St. George which "had not been made by a human hand". It is said, moreover, that in the night the icon had emitted a brilliant light. From that day on, the monastery was named the monastery of the (heavenly) Painter (Zographou).

The first historical source to mention the monastery is the first Typikon of 972, the "*Tragos*", which is also signed by the hegumen George of Zographou. At that time there were most probably already Bulgarian monks living in the monastery, but unfortunately we know very little about their history until the 13th century. Towards the end of this century, soldiers of the emperor Michael Palaeologus, who together with patriarch John Bekkus was a supporter of the union of the Eastern and Western churches, tortured and burnt alive twenty-six monks of the Monastery, who were fanatical supporters of the anti-unionist cause. A monument, erected in 1873 in the courtyard near the monastery's entrance, testifies to this event having occurred in 1276. Nonetheless, it was finally Michael who helped the "Bulgarian monastery" by granting it considerable sums of money.

The raids by Catalan mercenaries in 1307-1309 were extremely destructive. The Catalans killed many monks, plundered the monastery and finally set fire to it, burning most of its buildings. Almost all the surviving edifices date from the 19th century. After these calamities, the Serbian rulers and the Palaeologan emperors provided finan-

Interior of the dome decorated with scenes from the Apocalypse (19th c.).

cial support for the reconstruction of the monastery. During the years of Turkish occupation, Zographou was also assisted by the rulers of the Danube states. This brief period of prosperity was soon followed by decline and the monastery remained almost completely desolate. When the monks had almost given up hope, a new benefactor appeared on the scene in the person of the Hungarian ruler, Stephen VI the Good, who contributed significantly to the monastery's revival.

In 1716, the southeastern wing was built. At that time, besides the Bulgarians, there lived in the monastery both Serbian and Greek monks. Since 1845, however, only Bulgarians have lived in Zographou and the liturgy is performed in Bulgarian only.

Between 1862 and 1869 the northern wing was built, as was also the fortified gate, whose doors are made of wrought iron and have survived to our day. The last fire broke out in Zographou in 1976. The katholikon, which was built in 1800, was painted in 1817, al-

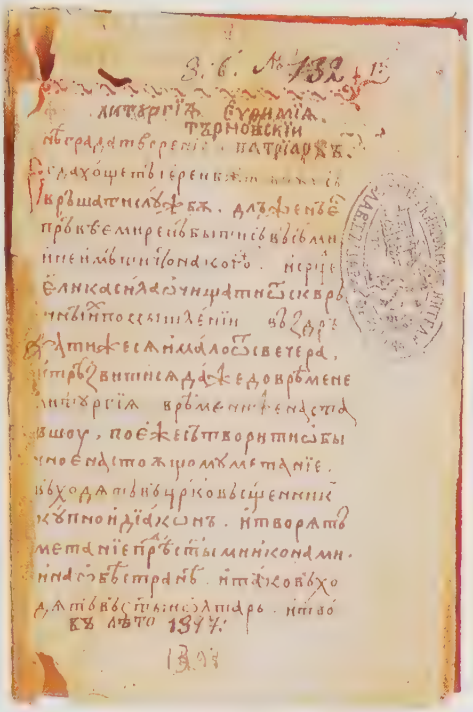
Wall paintings of Saints from the Katholikon of the Monastery.

though the narthex was only painted in 1840. The phiale is covered by a cupola supported by eight columns. In its centre is a fountain, adorned with lions' heads and with a marble figure of a monk as its base. Of the 16 chapels of the monastery, eight lie within the monastic precinct. The two most important ones are the chapel of the Virgin of the Akathistos Hymn in the courtyard, next to the Katholikon, and that of the saints Cyril and Methodius, which is adorned with exceptionally fine wall paintings. Regarding the icon of the Akathistos Hymn it is said that once a monk sang the entire Hymn before the icon without a pause. To reward him for his piety, when pirates once approached the monastery, the Virgin warned him to sound the alarm, thus saving the monastery.

The well-ordered library of the monastery, housed in the tower, includes 10,000 printed books, numerous Greek manuscripts, some rare Slav and Bulgarian manuscripts, and particularly valuable codices. The most important one is the Bulgarian cod. 47, the

Over-painted Slavic mural portraying St. George.

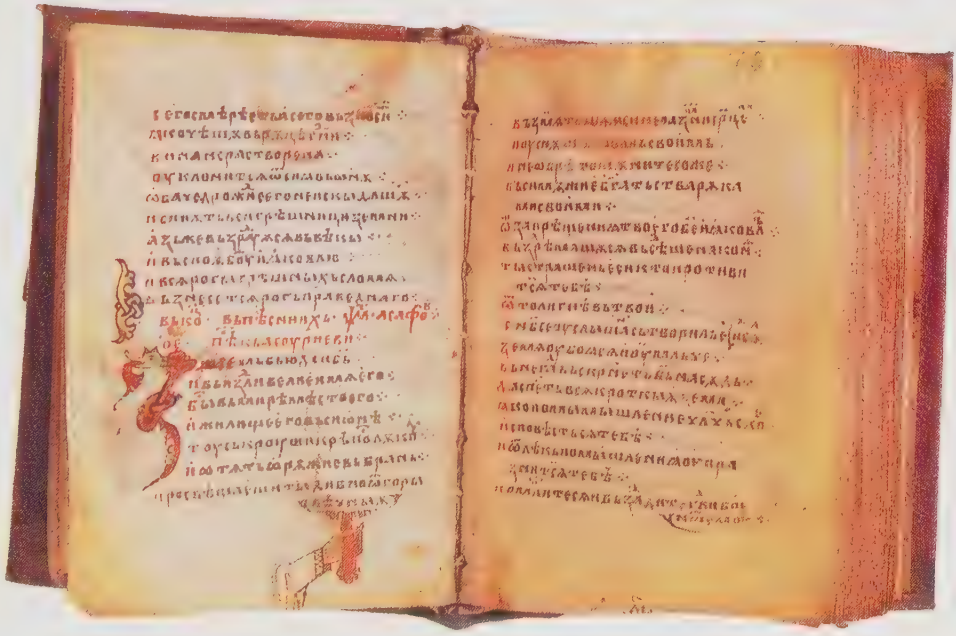
Ravomir psalter, dating from the 13th century. It measures 14 x 10 cm, and, besides the many illuminations, it contains a unique miniature portraying a cart drawn by four dragons with the body of a bird and the head of a dog. Three Slav manuscripts must also be mentioned: the 13th-century menologion of Dragan relating the lives of martyrs, the Slav Tetraevangelon cod. 28, dating from 1569, and lastly the Slav cod. 1, the first recording of the history of Bulgaria written by the monk Paisios in 1745. Besides the first icon of St. George, which is covered with gold, silver and diamonds, and is immediately related to the history of the foundation of the monastery (it probably dates from the 12th or 13th century), among the icons of the monastery are a second icon of St. George, of Arabian origin, as well as a third one, offered by Stephen IV of Moldavia-Wallachia in 1484. In the treasury are kept the relics of saints, vestments, liturgical vessels, many icons and exquisitely carved wooden crosses. One of the icons is that of the Virgin Epakouousa ("She who answers prayer"), in relation to which the following story is told: The devout monk, Cosmas, was deeply concerned with the question of which was the best way to approach God in order to save one's soul. As he pondered, he suddenly heard a heavenly voice ordering him to leave the monastery and to live the rest of his life as a hermit. The feast day of Zographou's patron saint, St. George, is celebrated on 23 April.



Missal, 14th c.

Tetraevangelon, 16th c.

Psalter, 13th c.



pp. 134-135: The esonarthex. The wall paintings depict Fathers of the Church, Patriarchs, the Martyrdom of Saints and representations of Angels.

MONASTERIES OF ATHOS

MONASTERY OF DOCHEIARIOU

MONASTERY OF DOCHEIARIOU

Like a fairy-tale castle, the Monastery of Docheiariou with its various structures, its numerous chimneys rising above the slate roofs, its balconies and covered porches, impresses and charms the visitor. From the lovely beach the monastery extends upwards over the verdant slope, ending at the fortified tower which dominates the entire group of buildings.

The position of the monastery on the western side of the northern coast is extremely picturesque. Situated only an hour's distance away from the Monastery of Xenophontos and two hours from the Monastery of Panteleimonos, it is the first monastery one sees as one approaches by boat from Ouranoupolis to Daphne. The monastery was named after its founder, Euthymios, a friend of Athanasius the Athonite, who lived as a monk at the Great Lavra and held the position of "docheiaris", that is of superintendent of stores. According to tradition, after the failure of his first attempt to found a monastery dedicated to St. Nicholas near Daphne, Euthymios erected the first buildings of the present monastery around 976, on the spot which had been ceded to him under a lease by the Monastery of Xenophontos. The first historical mention of the monastery appears in the second Typikon of 1045, which includes among its signatories a hegumen by the name of Theodoulos, "monk and hegumen of Docheiariou".

Euthymios dedicated the monastery to the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, and there is the following story regarding a miracle

performed by its patron-saints. Around 1092, a young shepherd named Basil discovered a treasure on the peninsula of Sithonia. The hegumen Neophytos, nephew of the founder Euthymios, sent two monks with the boy to bring the treasure back to the monastery. However, the two monks killed the shepherd boy on the return journey, tied his body to a heavy stone and sank it in the sea. After they had carefully hidden their booty, they resumed their journey, with the intention of accusing Basil of having taken the treasure and abandoned them. The two Archangels saved the innocent boy and brought him to the monastery. Word was sent to the hegumen by an acolyte to hurry to the church, where he found Basil under the great dome of the katholikon with a stone tied to a rope still around his neck and his clothes dripping water. When the two robber monks arrived later, the truth had already been made known. The wonderful murals on the cupola of the phiale still keep the story alive.

One of the first benefactors of the monastery was the emperor Nicephorus III Botaneiates, who undertook to cover the costs of the considerable extension works of the monastery and for this reason is mentioned as co-founder. The emperors who succeeded him, the Comneni (1081-1185) and the Angeli (1185-1204), also donated large sums of money for the embellishment of the monastery, which continued to prosper until the fall of Constantinople (1204) to the western armies, during the Fourth Crusade, and the Catalan raids. Prosperity and decline succeeded each other alternately, as was the case with the other Athonite monasteries during this period. At the end of the 14th and the begin-

ning of the 15th century, the Palaeologi (1261-1453) turned their attention and favour to the Docheiariou Monastery, which received equally lavish donations from the Serbian king, Stephan Dushan (1331-1355), as a result of which it was able to develop into a major monastery.

After 1459 and the begining of the Ottoman occupation in Serbia also, the sources of Docheiariou's funds ran dry. To these financial difficulties were added the raids of Turks and pirates, so that, although Docheiariou had also taken over the control of the small monastery of Calligraphou, it was left almost completely desolate.

In the courtyard of the monastery monks prepare the garlands that are to adorn the Katholikon on Easter Day.

The "Spring of the Archangels", behind the Katholikon, is embellished with rich wall-paintings. Here, too, are depicted the benefactors of the Monastery, Nikephorus III Botaneiates and Andronikos I Comnenos.

Christ Pantocrator on the vault of the guest parlour of the Docheiarion Monastery.

However, around 1560, a priest by the name of George, from the town of Adrianople, came to the monastery and was healed by the waters of the Archangels' spring, which to this day well up next to the katholikon. In gratitude, George donated all his property to the monastery. This donation, together with the financial contributions of the Danube countries, which had begun to flow in, allowed the monks to restore the entire complex. Among the benefactors of that period were the great Voivode of Wallachia, Peter IV Rares (1527-1538, 1541-1546), and his daughter Roxandra, wife of the Rumanian voivode Alexander Lapuscheanu (1533-1561, 1563-1568).

After the completion of the building works on the Refectory, in 1547, it was the turn of the Katholikon to be restored, in 1568, thanks to the contribution of the priest, George, and of the princess Roxandra. On the wall paintings is recorded the date 7076 from the creation of the world (i.e. 1568). The estates donated by Alexander, and the lands which, thanks to money also provided by Alexander, came once more into the possession of the monastery, now guaranteed it a firm financial base. In the early 17th century, the cost of the construction of the western wing and of the defensive tower was assumed by Yiannakis and Apostolakis. The monastery was completed in the 18th century, when the northwestern wing and the bell tower were built.

The katholikon, dedicated to the Archangels, is one of the largest on Athos. Its walls were adorned in 1568 with veritable masterpieces, which are today the best-preserved murals on Athos. They have been attributed to Zorzis or to some other artist of the Cretan School, who has faithfully followed the instructions given in the *Hermeneia tis Zografikis Technis* (Painter's Manual) written by the hieromonk Dionysius of Fourna between 1728 and 1733.

The richly carved wooden iconostasis dates from 1783. In the Katholikon there is also the tomb of Theophanes, bishop of Moldavia, who resigned from his office and lived in the monastery to the day of his death.

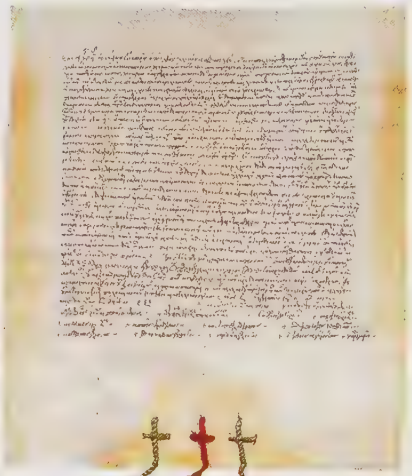
The tall tower protects the library, where 3,000 volumes of printed books are kept and 441 manuscripts, among which there are 62 on parchment. Among the precious illuminated manuscripts is the priceless *menologion* No.5, adorned with numerous miniatures.

The sacristy contains a great number of treasures: gold-embroidered cloths, carved wooden crosses with filigree decoration, holy relics and a fragment of the True Cross.

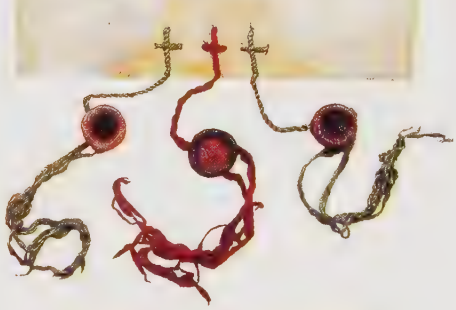
In one of the six chapels inside the monastery, there is, besides the other frescoes, the miracle-working icon of the Virgin Gorgoepikoös, which is particularly venerated. According to tradition, in the 17th century the icon miraculously healed a blind man and since then many sick people come to this icon to pray for a cure. The icon is placed in a niche next to the portico linking the katholikon to the Refectory. It has been painted onto the plaster and is now covered with gold. The walls of the Refectory are decorated with the most famous cycle of the Apocalypse, painted in 1700. Exquisite frescoes also adorn the interior of the phiale, behind the katholikon.

The Docheiariou Monastery possesses two kellia in Karyes, that of the Aghioi Pantes (All Saints) and that of the Five Martyrs.

A document of the Monastery dated August 1570.



The Lamentation at the Tomb, 17th-16th c.



Chalice, 16th c.

MONASTERIES OF ATHOS

MONASTERY OF KARAKALLOU

Wall painting of the Virgin from the exonarthex of the Karakallou Monastery.

MONASTERY OF KARAKALLOU

The monastery of Karakallou is built on a fairly gentle slope at a height of 200 metres. Rising above the wild hazels and the olive trees, which present a pleasant contrast to the impressive dark green forests of Athos, the Monastery looks out over the rocky eastern coast of the promontory. Situated at half an hour's distance from its port and three hours from Karyes, it stands guard over the footpath which follows the coastline and links the monasteries of Iviron and the Great Lavra.

The monastery's claim to fame as having been built by the Roman emperor, Caracalla (211-217) has certainly only a legendary basis. It is much more likely that its name originates from the Turkish expression "kara kalé" which means black fortress, or "kara koulé" which means black tower. According to another story, a monk, a nobleman named Nicholas Karakallos, founded the monastery during the reign of the Byzantine emperor Romanos IV Diogenes (1068-1071), on the site where there was initially a small monastic settlement. The document ratifying the monastery's foundation has been lost in the upheavals caused by the various raids it suffered, and only the lead bull of the document, showing on the obverse Christ with the emperor Romanos and his wife, and on the reverse the sons of the emperor, has survived. The monastery is also mentioned in a

document of the *Protepistatis* Nicephorus, dating from 1018. It is very probable that the monastic settlement was at that time much smaller and for that reason was not recognized as a monastery, which may also account for the fact that it is not mentioned in the second Typikon of Athos. An abbot Michael, from the Monastery of Karakallou, is first mentioned in 1087 in a document of the Protepistatis of the time.

During the first two centuries after its foundation, Karakallou suffered the same fate as the other monasteries. It was raided and plundered by pirates and Catalan mercenaries and in the 14th century was almost completely deserted. The monastery complex, which had been totally destroyed by the Crusaders, was rebuilt thanks to the generosity of the Palaeologi, Michael IV (1259-1282), Andronicus II (1282-1328), and later John V, as well as of Patriarch Athanasius and the Protepistates Isaac (circa 1334). Concomitantly with this financial assistance, new impetus was given to Karakallou by the influx of many young monks. However, in the years that followed, the monastery was repeatedly ravaged by fires, and sacked and pillaged by pirates and the Turkish conquerors.

The monastery had to liquidate a large part of its estates, as it found itself once again on the brink of financial disaster. It was able to recover thanks to huge donations by the voivode of Moldavia and Wallachia, John Peter IV Raresh, who later lived in Karakallou as a simple monk and is honoured as a second founder. In 1570, his daughter Roxandra and her husband John Alexander IV Lapuscheanu afforded the monastery

the financial possibility of regaining much of its lost land, thus re-establishing it on a firm economic base. Its benefactors also commissioned the very elaborate decoration of the restored buildings and financed the erection of new buildings such as the Katholikon (1548-1563). A firman of sultan Suleiman the Great, dating from 1535, granted Alexander permission to rebuild the monastery, but "*..only on the old foundations, without adding any new edifices*".

Another benefactress presented herself in the person of the daughter of Suleiman, who bought the land which the monastery had sold, and then returned it to Karakallou. Also dating from this period is the great defensive tower which was erected by the abbot Germanos.

In the 17th century, around 1674, the rulers of Iberia, Arthil and his brother Baktag, contributed to the prosperity of the monastery by making very important donations. The two brothers later retreated to Karakallou, where they lived as monks until their death.

In the 18th century, the hieromonk Dionysius played a leading part in the extension of the building complex which, however, was largely destroyed by a fire that broke out in 1879. After this fire, the Refectory was once again rebuilt, as were the guest rooms and several wings of monks' cells, and the monastery took on the appearance it has today. However, the marks of the fire which broke out recently and destroyed a large part of the north wing, are still visible.

The Katholikon was completed in 1563 but was painted much later, in 1716, while the decoration of the esonarthex dates from 1750. The noteworthy frescoes of the exonarthex, representing scenes from the Apocalypse, were painted in 1763. Among the 279 manuscripts in the library there are only a few dating from Byzantine times. Of the 42 manuscripts on vellum preserved by the Monastery of Karakallou, particularly valuable is codex no. 11. The manuscript, measuring 26x20 cm. and written in minuscule script, has been assigned by art historians to different periods (10th-13th centuries). A total of 2,500 printed books are included in the collection of the library, which in the past centuries was repeatedly destroyed by fire.

In the sacristy are kept fragments of the True Cross, holy relics, gold-embroidered vestments, and liturgical vessels. There are, of course, a great number of portable icons, of which the most important is the icon of the Apostles Peter and Paul, to whom the monastery is dedicated and whose feast-day it celebrates on 29 July. The icon was painted by the artist Constantine Paleokapas in 1540.

The carved wooden iconostasis of the Katholikon holds the icon of the Twelve Apostles, a work of the author of the *Painter's Manual*, Dionysius of Fourna, painted in 1722.

Besides the five chapels situated within the monastery precinct, there are another two outside its walls. The monastery also has four Kellia in Karyes and another 14 to the north. The defensive tower with its battlements, which was constructed with funds provided by the voivode John Peter and built by the abbot Germanos in the early 16th century, dominates the small harbour. The erection of the tower, which has its own Refectory and chapel, was completed in 1534, as is testified by the inscription on its walls.

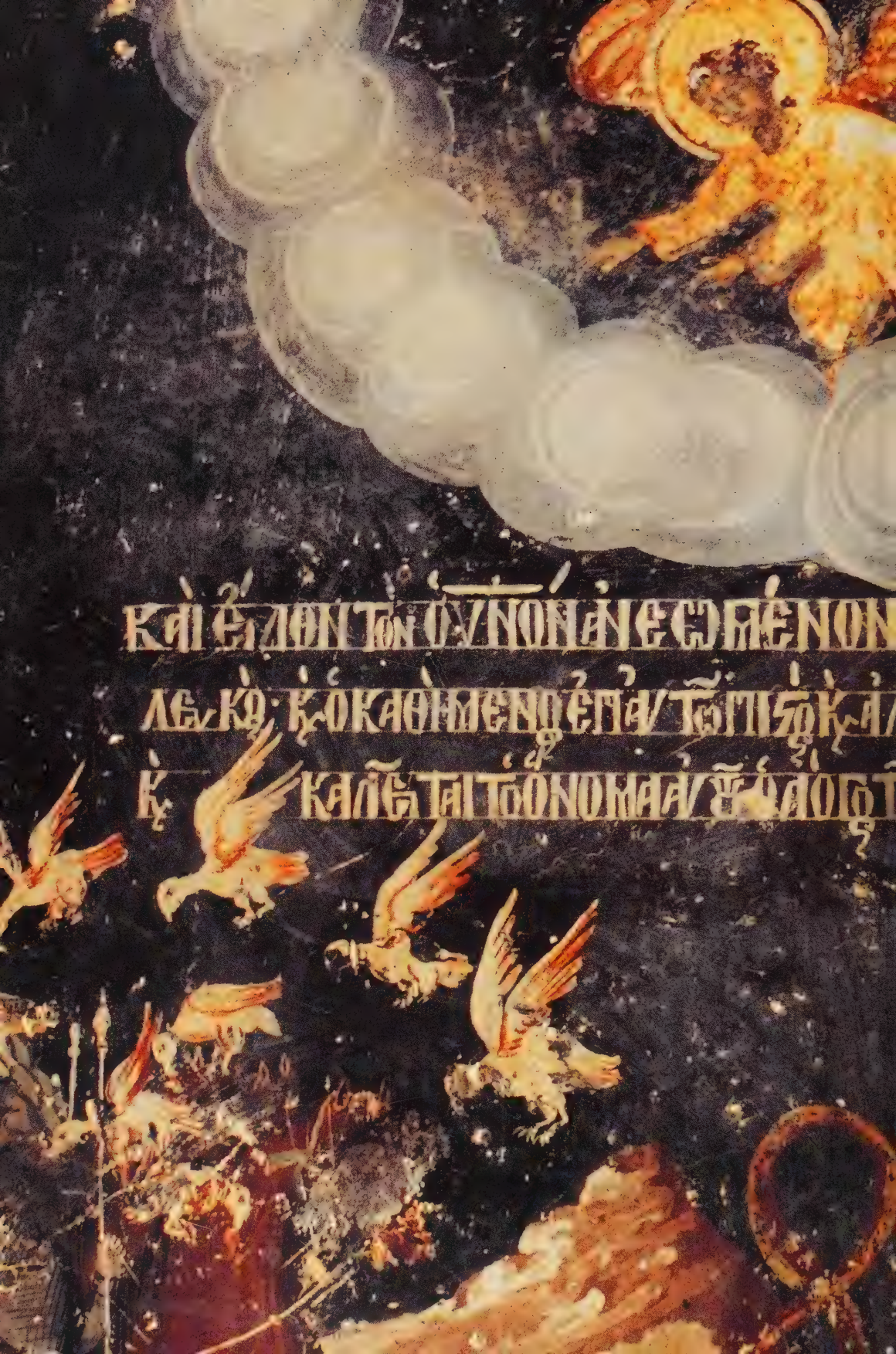
Epimanikia (cuffs) with a representation of the Annunciation. 17th c.

Girdle with buckle. 18th c.

Tetraevangelon, 1st c.

Seal of the Karakallou Monastery. 19th c.

pp. 152-153: ***The exonarthex. Frescoes of the Apocalypse.***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MONASTERY OF PHILOTHEOU

MONASTERY OF PHILOTHEOU

On the eastern inclines of Athos, sloping down to the Strymonic gulf, and at a distance of half an hour's climb from the monastery of Karakallou, stands the Monastery of Philotheou, surrounded by orchards. Built at an altitude of 330 metres, it offers a panoramic view, particularly towards the north. On the horizon one can distinguish, above the tree-covered hills, the monastery of Pantocrator, situated five hours away on foot from Philotheou.

According to tradition, there stood here, in ancient times, an Asclepieion, while centuries later a small monastic settlement was built on the same spot. It is not known when this settlement developed into a large monastic community. Tradition places the foundation of the monastery towards the end of the first millennium, and mentions as its founders three monks, contemporaries of Athanasius the Athonite: Arsenius, Dionysius and Philotheus, the latter giving the monastery its name. According to historical sources, in a document of the Protepistatis Nicephoros, dating to 1015, the name of George, hegumen of Philotheou, is also mentioned.

In the second Typikon of 1046 there also appears a Luke, hegumen of the Monastery of Philotheou, which is ranked twelfth in the hierarchy of the Holy Mountain, a position it holds to this day. The financial means for the erection of the grand buildings were provided by the emperor Nicephoros III

Botaneiates (1078-1081) who has since then been honoured as the monastery's second founder. Besides material gifts, the emperor donated to the monastery numerous holy relics of saints and martyrs. A particularly precious gift is a nail said to have been used in the Crucifixion of Christ.

Two centuries later, the Palaeologan emperors Andronicus II (1282-1328) Andronicus III (1328-1341) and John V (1354-1391) provided funds for the maintenance of the monastery. After the fall of Constantinople and the collapse of the Byzantine empire, the gifts of the Byzantine emperors ceased and the financial support of the monastery was assumed by Rumanian rulers.

A document dating from 1483, signed by the hegumen in Slavonic and not in Greek, indicates that a number of Slavs also lived in the monastery. At that time, the Serbian ruler Stephan Dushan sent considerable sums of money, and, as a chrysobull from 1346 shows, he ordained that Serbian and Bulgarian monks should come to Philotheou, which was then almost totally deserted. For a long time these monks constituted the majority in the monastic community.

After a new period of decline, the rulers of Iberia, George Leontinos and his son Alexander, became the monastery's patrons, and their lavish gifts helped the monks to completely restore Philotheou. "*This monastery was restored thanks to the generous assistance of the God-fearing emperor of Iberia in June of the year 7050*", reads the inscription carved in marble, over the entrance, in commemoration of that event (1540).

However, the financial situation of the monastery continually worsened as the Turkish conquerors had imposed a tax on the land, and much of the monastery's property had to be sacrificed in order to meet expenses. In 1573 Philotheou also sold the deserted Kelli of Stavronikita to the bishop Gregorius Geromerius, who later developed it into a large monastery. Relative relief, in the dire financial situation in which the monastery found itself, was offered a century later by the Tsar of Russia, who granted permission to the monks to raise funds on his territories. Only by the provision of significant annual grants however, could some way out of Philotheou's financial impasse be found. A chrysobull of the ruler of Wallachia, Gregory Ghikas, guaranteed these annual grants for the monastery, on the condition that it send to Wallachia one of its holy relics, the right hand of St. John Chrysostom.

A new period of prosperity then began for the Monastery of Philotheou, which ended suddenly with the great fire of 1871. Almost the entire complex was burnt down, except for the Katholikon and the library. This time, the pace of the restoration was very slow but, thanks to the many benefactors and donors, the rebuilding was eventually completed.

In recent decades the influx of young and enthusiastic monks has been great and the monastic community has been considerably reinvigorated, a fact to which also contributed the conversion of Philotheou from an idiorrhythmic to a coenobitic monastery. This resulted in the model restoration of the entire complex.

The Katholikon was built in 1746 on the ruins of the previous one, and as one can read in the inscription on the wall of the right-

The monastery gates open at sunrise and shut at sunset.

hand choir, its walls were painted in 1752. The esonarthex and the exonarthex walls were adorned a few years later, in 1765, with marvellous scenes from the Apocalypse, while the marble floor and the iconostasis were completed almost a century later (1848 and 1853 respectively). The church is dedicated to the Annunciation, commemorated on 25 March.

The bell tower, incorporated into the katholikon - a feature not at all characteristic of Athonite architecture - bears the date 1764. The superb frescoes adorning the Refectory, which are attributed to the Cretan School, have fortunately been preserved. The phiale in front of the church is made of carved white marble.

The construction of all these edifices was completed thanks to the rulers of Rumania, Constantine Mavrocordatos and Gregory Ghikas, who provided large sums of money. Their successors continued to provide funds, and it was thus made possible for the monastery to be rebuilt after the terrible fire of 1871.

Besides the fragment of the True Cross, a gift of the emperor Nicephorus III Botaneiates, in the sacristy of Philotheou is also preserved the right hand of St. John Chrysostom, a gift of the emperor Andronicus II. Here, too, are kept numerous relics, crosses, vestments and liturgical vessels, but chiefly portable icons, of which the one held most precious by the monastery is the miracle-working icon of the Virgin Glykophilousa. This icon, on the left icon-stand of the Katholikon, portrays the Virgin "sweetly embracing" Jesus. According to tradition, in the time of the emperor Leo II the Isaurian - during the period of the iconoclastic controversy - Victoria, the wife of the Byzantine patrician Simeon,

A monk in the courtyard in front of the Katholikon.

herself a devout Christian, threw the icon into the sea to save it from destruction. The icon sailed across the straits of the Dardanelles and landed on the eastern shore of Mt. Athos, where it was discovered by the abbot of Philotheou. From the spot where the icon was found, in the anchorage below the monastery, holy water sprang, which since then has healed many paralytics and many sterile women. Among the miracles attributed to the icon is also the rescue, in 1817, of a ship carrying pilgrims, which was in danger of sinking off the island of Imbros, during a terrible storm. The Virgin appeared at that moment and, holding the helm herself, steered the ship to a safe harbour.

Another well-known icon treasured at Philotheou is that of the Virgin Gerontissa. Among the 250 manuscripts which have been preserved, a number of them written on vellum, particularly precious is the illuminated Philotheou cod. 33, a *tetraevangelon* of the 10th century bearing the oldest known representation of one of the Evangelists and executed after the Iconoclast controversy. Within the monastery precinct there are six chapels, dedicated respectively to the Archangels (1752), to St. John the Baptist (1776), to St. Marina, to the Five Martyrs, to St. Chrysostom and to St. Nicholas. Outside the walls there are another three chapels, one in the cemetery, one in the gardens and one at a *kathisma*. All three Kellia which belong to the monastery are inhabited today.

Pages 160-161: ***In the courtyard of the Monastery the monks prepare the tunny fish they have just caught.***

MONASTERY OF SIMONOPETRA

Simonopetra. The most daring edifice in Europe.

MONASTERY OF SIMONOPETRA

On the western shore, at a distance of two hours from Daphne, the Monastery of Simonos Petra (also known as Simonopetra) towers high up on the ridge of a rock, at an altitude of 200 metres above the sea. As one turns one's glance from the shore towards the monastery, one feels transported to another world.

The story handed down by tradition regarding the foundation of the many-storeyed monastic fortress, centres around a vision which appeared to a hermit monk, Simon, in his cave, near the present site of the monastery. On Christmas eve he saw a star shining with a wondrous brilliance on the rock where the monastery stands today. Simon interpreted his vision as a divine command to build a monastery on that spot. He did not dare to do so, however, since the spot was extremely isolated and precipitous, so he began to build near his cave, where the ground was more level and safe. Each night the walls Simon built during the day collapsed, until at last he took courage and began his work on the site indicated by the star. With the help of his followers and other monks, he started to build above the precipice. Many of his men could not stand the danger to which they were exposed day after day, and finally decided to give up the job. Simon then asked the deacon, Isaiah,

to give the departing men a little wine and bread for the journey. As Isaiah was approaching the building, he slipped and fell over the precipice. However an angel stopped his fall and his friends, who believed him dead, found him standing on a ledge of the rock, holding the jug with the wine, unspilled, in his hands. Seeing this miracle, Simon's followers took courage and finished this unique edifice.

Simon gave the monastery the name of "New Bethlehem", which it kept until the 19th century, when the monastery, which had been burnt down for the third consecutive time and was being rebuilt thanks to the untiring efforts of the hegumen, Neophytus Molakides, was refered to as the"monastery on Simon's rock - Moni Simonos Petra", a name that stuck and was eventually adopted by the Athonite monks. Already in the 14th century the imposing edifices gave the monastery a most impressive appearance. This was around 1368, when the Serbian ruler John Uglesha ratified its foundation by a chrysobull.

During the reign of Stephan Dushan (1331-1335), Serbia had reached the height of its power, its authority extending all the way to Mt. Athos. After Dushan's death, when Stephen V Urosh (1355-1367) acceded to the throne, the territories conquered by Dushan began to obtain their autonomy and eventually came under the control of feudal lords. In 1365 the leadership of southern Serbia was assumed by duke John Uglesha, who is mentioned in the history of the monastery as a great benefactor and the second founder of Simonos Petra. This period of development and prosperity came to a sudden end when a terrible fire completely destroyed the monastery. Only the tower, which had been especially built to withstand such cat-

astrophes, was spared. The monks who had sought shelter in the tower, taking with them the monastery's treasury, were able, after the fire, to rent part of the monastery of Xenophontos and settle there for quite a long while. This was fortunate for the monks of Xenophontos as well, since the rent money enabled them to pay off the debts incurred by their own monastery.

The archives of the monastery were completely destroyed in this fire, the flames having devoured almost all the official documents, chrysobulls and contracts. In the following years the monastery was rebuilt very slowly, despite the enormous privations suffered by the monks and the considerable financial assistance offered by the Rumanian ruler Michael Viteasul the Brave (1593-1601), the voivode who, around 1600, had managed for a short period of time to unite under his rule the provinces of Moldavia, Wallachia and the Heptapyrgion.

However, all the sacrifices and privations of the monks were suffered in vain, since, as soon as the reconstruction of the monastery was completed, a new destructive fire broke out. The monastery went through a period of total decline until 1762, when the Ukrainian hieromonk Paisios Velitskovski appeared on the scene with his followers, and began efforts to revive the monastery.

During the same period, money for the restoration of the monastery was being collected by a Greek named Jehoshaphat, from the island of Lesbos. It was Jehoshaphat who bought from pirates the holy relic of the left palm of St. Magdalene, which has been preserved until this day in the monastery.

The third great fire of 1891 completely destroyed the monastery of Simonos Petra. This time, the church and the library with its treasures were also destroyed. The monks escaped by jumping out of a small window, but they were able to rescue only a few holy relics, icons and official documents.

Lavish donations, especially from the tsars of Russia, once again permitted the reconstruction of the monastery.

In August 1990 a house in the Skete of Provatas caught fire. Carried by the surrounding trees, the blaze spread rapidly towards the Monastery of Philotheou but, just before it reached the Monastery, the direction of the wind changed and the flames, passing through the hills to the west, approached Simonos Petra, where they consumed the forest all the way down to the west coast. From there the fire took a northerly direction towards Daphne and the Monastery of Xeropotamou. The little village of Daphne was saved thanks to the efforts of the inhabitants, who doused the houses, and especially the roofs, with sea water. Just before reaching Xeropotamou, the flames miraculously stopped and died out. It was the Monastery of Simonos Petra, however, which suffered the greatest damage, but fortunately at least no lives were lost.

Although it has lost all its historic buildings and almost all its treasures, Simonopetra still radiates a nobility and profound serenity which fills the pilgrim who gazes out from this heavenly pulpit over the verdant undulating hills or the boundless sea with wonder and awe.

The Monastery of Simonos Petra is dedicated to the Nativity of Christ.

Pages 168-169: ***After the fire of 1891. he Refectory was built from the beginning.***

The saints of the Menologion, 19th c.

Veil of the Royal Door of the Sanctuary embroidered with a representation of the Nativity, 1627.

Chalice, 1600.

MONASTERY OF ST. PAUL

Many of the buildings destroyed by fires and floods were rebuilt in the early 20th century using iron and concrete.

MONASTERY OF ST. PAUL

The Monastery of St. Paul stands at an altitude of 140 metres on a small ridge, between two streams, with the sheer northern slopes of Mt. Athos as a background. Some of the more recent buildings have been built of concrete and extend over the inhospitable slope as far as the alluvial banks of the southern river bed that runs down through the steep gorges of Mt. Athos. When the snows melt, or after a storm, the stream becomes a raging torrent, and not few are the times when it has wrecked and swept away entire buildings in its fury. Damage is also caused by avalanches, which have repeatedly destroyed various edifices of the monastery. The harbour, which in antiquity was probably the site of the little town of Palaeochorion, lies half an hour away from the monastery. The road passes over the enormous boulders brought down on various occasions by the two torrents. In the spring, this inhospitable landscape changes completely, and with the awakening of Nature the entire hillside is covered with a fantastic carpet of wild flowers.

There are many stories surrounding the monastery's name. The most convincing one, however, is the story that relates it to the monk, Paul Xeropotamites, the founder of Xeropotamou, who, in the latter years of his life, retreated to the isolation of this area in order to be able to devote himself to spiritual exercise and prayer.

However, because the Monastery was initially founded as a Kelli of Xeropotamou, it was not sufficiently important to be mentioned in the second Typikon of 1046. In 1259 it appeared in the chrysobull of the emperor Michael Palaeologus as holding the position of a small monastery in the hierarchy of the Holy Mountain. It is also mentioned in an official document of the emperor, but, after the pirate raids and depredations by the Catalans, it once again

lost its importance and returned to the status of a simple Kelli.

After this, two Serbian monks, Gerasimos Radonius and Antonios Pagases from Xeropotamou, by dint of their own hard labour, rebuilt the monastery of St. Paul on its ruins, and succeeded in having it recognized as a monastery, mentioned in the third Typikon of 1394 as holding the eighteenth position in the Athonite hierarchy. The monastery appears for the first time as an entity independent of Xeropotamou in the official document of the patriarch Matthew in 1401. Its hegumens' signatures are in the Slavonic script. Later, when Greek monks also began to sign important documents, a seal bearing both scripts was used, and continued to be used for very many years.

The first and most important benefactors of the monastery were the despots of Serbia, the all-powerful Brankovitch family. George Brankovitch (1427-1456), together with his two sons Stephen and Gregory, undertook the construction of the Katholikon, which is dedicated to St. George, in memory of its founder. His daughter, Mara, married the Turkish sultan Murad II (1421-1451) for political reasons, but the sultan did not oblige his wife to change her religion. Thus, Mara's lavish gifts, both of money and of land, once more guaranteed the prosperity of the monastery. When, after the fall of Constantinople, the remains of the "Gifts of the Three Magi" fell into the hands of the Turks, Mara decided to consign this precious treasure to her beloved monastery. She landed on the shore below the monastery, and began to wend her way up the hill. Suddenly, she

heard a voice from heaven commanding her to turn back, because there was room for only one queen on the Holy Mountain, the Mother of God. To this day, the chapel halfway up the road linking the shore and the monastery stands as a reminder of this memorable visit of a woman to Athos.

The monastery of St. Paul continued to prosper in the 16th century under the protection and patronage of the rulers of Moldavia and Wallachia. In 1521, Neagu provided the funds for the building of the defensive tower by the walls, in the upper part of the complex. Just beside it is the chapel of St. George, which was adorned in 1423-1425 with marvellous murals by artists of the Cretan School. Stephen the Great, ruler of Moldavia (1457-1504) was one of the great benefactors of the monastery. The Brankovitch family continued to offer its financial support until the 17th century, but to an ever lessening degree. It was withdrawn entirely in 1710, when the Greek monks, then in the majority, took over the administration of the monastery. There followed years of serious financial troubles due, mainly, to the poll tax imposed by the Turkish conquerors. The monks were able to overcome the terrible shortages and poverty of that time thanks to the assistance of generous benefactors, but above all thanks to the tireless efforts in the 18th century of the monastery's treasurer, Gregory, who managed to collect considerable amounts of money for the restoration of the monastery through the fund-raising campaigns he organised in Eastern Europe.

In the early years of the 19th century, another monk, Anthimos Comnennos from Silybria, a friend of patriarch Gregory V, undertook the restoration of the building complex and made large donations in land. During the years of the Greek War of Independence, the monastery was destroyed and remained completely desolate after the repeated Turkish raids it suffered in retaliation for the losses inflicted on the Turkish armies by the Greeks. Later, thanks to the donations of the Tsars Alexander I and Nicholas I, the reconstruction of the buildings was made possible. The monks who returned there, however, were almost exclusively Greeks. In 1902, a huge fire once again destroyed half the buildings.

Those that were built in the following years were once more destroyed by a terrible flood caused by the torrents in 1911. But this time, modern technology and materials were used in the reconstruction of the buildings. Thus, with the exception of the huge wings of the Monastery of Panteleimonos, which in the meantime have suffered the ravages of a destructive fire and are crumbling, the monastery of St. Paul is the only one which has been built with concrete and displays distinctive cast-iron railings and other decorative elements.

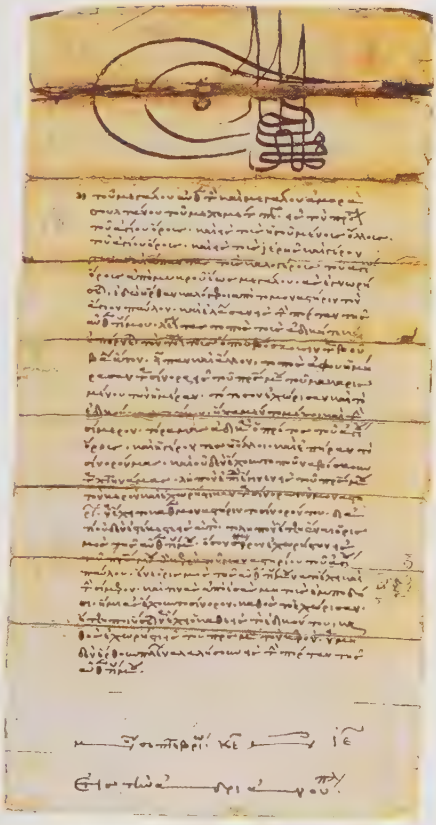
The walls of the katholikon, inaugurated on the feast-day of St. George, are faced with marble, as is the altar screen. The katholikon, dedicated to the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, managed to survive the fire fairly unscathed; but of the original wall-paintings that adorned the old katholikon of the Brankovitch family only a small part has survived. The inscription on the great chandelier of the church mentioning the name of its maker and the year 1659, is some-

Frescoes on the vault of the exonarthex with scenes of the Second Coming.

what puzzling. It is written in German, but contains many mistakes. As the chandelier was made in Dresden, it is conjectured that the author of the inscription was the Serbian monk Isaiah, who supervised its execution but whose knowledge of German was poor. In 1920 the library was burnt down, and a large part of its contents destroyed, in particular the manuscripts on vellum. All that remains today are 500 manuscripts and 10,000 printed books of more recent times. The monks were fortunately able to save the monastery's treasures and relics from the hands of the barbarian hordes who constantly raided the monastery. Thus in the sacristy today can be found very precious relics, such as the Gifts of the Magi, two fragments of the True Cross, and a wonderful enamel diptych with an impressive icon of the Pantocrator. This diptych, measuring approximately 35 x 28 cm, also portrays, in a frame of pearls, the Virgin and St. John and next to them the Archangels Michael and Gabriel. It originates from the famous Maas School and was made around 1200 using a special technique. A similar example of the art of the same school exists in the Neuburg Monastery in Austria. Very precious, too, is the pearl-encrusted pastoral cross with its 40 miniatures, shining beneath its crystal covering. Among the surviving treasures are also the icon of St. George and the icon of the Virgin Myrovlitissa.

Three Kellia, situated in Karyes, belong to the Monastery as do also two Sketes: the Rumanian Skete tou Lakkou, on the eastern side of Mt. Athos, dedicated to St. Demetrius, comprising 20 Kalyves, and the Greek Nea Skete, situated on the western shore, half an hour's walk to the south-east of the monastery.

Diptych with small icons. End of 13th-beginning of 14th c.



Firman of Mehmed II the Conqueror, 25 September 1451.

Sanctuary doors, 16th c.

MONASTERY OF STAVRONIKITA

MONASTERY OF STAVRONIKITA

Like a mediaeval fortress which has been here since the beginning of time, the Monastery of Stavronikita stands on a rock, 50 metres above the eastern shores of Athos. If one looks out towards the south, one can distinguish, beyond the inhospitable sea, the monastery of Iviron, the tower of the monastery of Philotheou and, in the background, the peaks of Athos.

The monastery is built on the coastal road and lies at a distance of one hour's walk from the monastery of Iviron and the monastery of Pantocrator. Regarding its foundation and name there are many and various legends which, however, are not historically substantiated. One of them links the name of the monastery to its founders, Stavros and Nikitas, the other to an officer of the emperor John Tzimisces, Nicephoros Stavronikitas, who later became the abbot of the monastery. There are, however, other versions according to which the monastery was originally a Kelli under the same name, or that its name originated from a patrician named Nikitas who appears as the founder of the monastery. The monks, however, tend to support the first version which ascribes the name to the two founders. A document of the *Protos*, Nicephorus, dating from 1012, confirms the existence of the Kelli in the 10th century. Another document dating from 1153 mentions a Stavronikita Kelli. It is very probable that the new monastery which stood on this spot in 1533 and belonged to the Philotheou monastery had fallen prey to pirate attacks and the depredations of returning Crusaders, as

well as to the raids of Catalans, after which it had probably ceased to exist as a monastery and had returned to the status of a simple Kelli, since it was impossible for it to meet the requirements of the normal functioning of a monastery. This Kelli initially belonged to the Koutloumousiou monastery and later to Philotheou, from which Gregory Geromeriatis, who became the first hegumen of the monastery, bought the buildings and the lands of the Kelli for a sum of four thousand *aspra* (silver coins).

It was this hegumen, a movingly dedicated figure, who first surrounded the monastery with walls and began to build. His work was continued and completed by Patriarch Jeremias I (1520-1545), who often visited the monastery, donated considerable amounts of money for its extension and had it placed under his personal protection. The monks honour him today, together with Gregory, as the second founder of the monastery.

In 1607 the monastery was burnt down for the first time and it was necessary to rebuild it almost from its foundations. The katholikon was built in 1527 and the interior walls were decorated in 1546 with murals which rank among the most admirable of the Holy Mountain painted by the famous artist of the Cretan School, Theophanes. The grand aqueduct, which guaranteed the supply of water to the monastery, was built at this time, thanks to the generous gift of the voivode of Wallachia, Cantacouzenos.

ΙΣ
ΧΣ

The disastrous fires of 1817, 1864 and 1879, added to the unfavourable political events taking place in the outside world, obliged the monastic community, twice in four years, to admit its impossibility to meet its financial obligations. In order to repair the damage caused by the fires, the monastery had had to resort to borrowing huge sums of money. Unfortunately, the establishment of the Rumanian state, which occurred at the same time, resulted in the confiscation of all the lands in the vicinity of Bucharest donated to the Monastery by the Duke, Alexander Ghikas (1727-1740), as a consequence of which the monastery was deprived of all its financial resources.

For these reasons, Stavronikita was brought under the jurisdiction of the central administration of the Holy Mountain. However, three years later it found itself once more on the verge of bankruptcy. The Holy Community, therefore, appointed as its trustee the very able Archimandrite Theophilos of Vatopedi who, in the space of ten years, managed to restore the financial soundness of the monastery and to secure its independence for the future.

The generous grants of the tsars of Russia in the early years of the 20th century provided considerable support and hope to the monastery of Stavronikita. Russian monks settled in the cells of the monastery and their contribution to the revival of monastic life was substantial. However the political developments that followed the First World War caused these contacts to break off completely.

In the decade of the '60s the situation had become dramatic, as only eleven very aged monks remained. Miraculously, exactly at that time, many young and zealous monks began to come to Stavronikita and, in 1968, the reinvigorated monastic community decided to return to the strict coenobitic rules. The foundations were laid for a general restoration of the monastery, with the result that, today, Stavronikita can claim to be one of the best organized monasteries on Athos. An inscription above a window of the katholikon gives us the following information: it was "built in 1456 with money donated by the Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremias, was painted by Theophanes the Cretan and his assistant, Simeon, with the help and support of the God-beloved Makarios, bishop of Ierissos and Athos, as well as of the righteous monk of this monastery, Gregory, on the third of July".

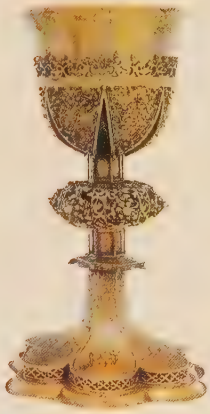
The small katholikon is squeezed in the exceedingly small space of the courtyard, but it is nevertheless one of the most beautiful of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The tightness of space led necessarily to the building of an edifice whose plan differs from the traditional arrangement of the *katholika* of Mt.

pp.184-185: ***The Descent into Hell (1546), by Theophanes of Crete.***

Athos. Following the very careful restoration which they recently underwent, the wall paintings of the Katholikon are now in excellent condition. Their creator, Theophanes, together with his son Simeon, also painted the icons of the iconostasis. These represent the Dodecaorton, the cycle of the twelve most important feasts of Orthodoxy. Outstanding among the works of art adorning the church is the 14th-century mosaic icon of St. Nicholas, said to have lain at the bottom of the sea for 500 years, where it was found by some fishermen who brought it to the monks. An oyster that had become embedded in a crack on the Saint's forehead was seen as a sign of the miracle-working powers of the icon, which was named St. Nicholas Streidas (*streidi* = oyster). The shell is preserved as a holy relic.

The large icon of the Deesis in the esonarthex presents a deviation from traditional iconography, since on Jesus' left it is not the Virgin but St. Nicholas who stands in prayer. The artist probably thus wished to emphasize the fact that the church was dedicated to St. Nicholas. This 16th-century icon was probably painted especially for the katholikon, which was completed in 1546. The Refectory contains many fine wall paintings, which are also attributed to the Cretan School. During the past centuries the library has been repeatedly devastated by fires. However, 170 manuscripts, among them 58 on vellum, were preserved. The most precious of these is the Evangelistarion No. 46. This richly illustrated work, measuring 28 x 22 cm, contains in its 298 pages miniatures of the four Evangelists and exquisite decorations. The treasury contains holy relics, precious liturgical vessels and vestments, the gold-embroidered icon of St. Nicholas, as well as numerous portable icons, of which the most important is the mosaic icon of St. Nicholas Streidas described above. Of the six chapels of the monastery, four are within the monastery precinct. It has four Kellia in Karyes and 44 Kalyves in the area of Kapsala. Stavronikita celebrates its feast day on 6 December.

MONASTERY OF XENOPHONTOS



MONASTERY OF XENOPHONTOS

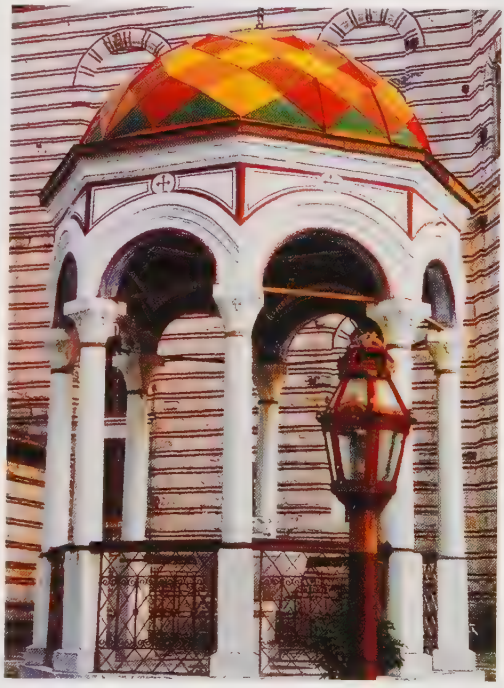
Three quarters of an hour's walk from the neighbouring monastery of Docheiariou and an hour and a half's walk from Panteleimonos, brings us to the impressive fortress of the Monastery of Xenophontos, which stands among orchards, on the gentle mountain slopes rising from the western coast of the Athos peninsula.

Tradition links the foundation of the monastery in 520 to a certain senator named Xenophon - a hermit monk who was canonised by the Orthodox Church and who may perhaps indeed have built the chapel of St. Demetrius. The story is unsubstantiated in this case as in many others. The common aim of the monks relating these stories was to credit their monastery with being of the oldest possible age. Of course, there is no doubt that, already in this early period, there were monks who came together in small - very small, in fact - settlements, in Kalyves or in small Sketes, in order to live and pray together. However, the regular monastic communities were most probably formed after the foundation of the Great Lavra by St. Athanasius. We can therefore suppose that the monastery of Xenophontos in reality owes its name to a Xenophon living on Athos in the 10th century, who is mentioned in the biography of Athanasius the Athonite as the "elder and hegumen of a holy place on the Mountain", whatever this may mean.

The monastery is dedicated to St. George, as is the monastery of Zographou and that of St. Paul. In official documents it appears for the first time in 1033, although there are indications that the first mention of the monastery was made in 998. It can be surmised that the emperor Basil II (976-1025) granted to Xenophontos a monastery by the name of

Ieromnemonos. The next mention in official documents, dating to 1083, is related to the turbulent events that followed. At that time, a wealthy admiral from Constantinople came to the monastery. He was a friend of the emperor Nicephorus III Botaneiatis (1078-1081) who became a monk under the name of Symeon. By disbursing large sums of money from his own pocket, he was able to make significant extensions to Xenophontos and to buy large pieces of land in its name.

Much later, in 1225, pirates plundered and destroyed large sections of the monastery, and, a few decades after this Xenophontos suffered repeated raids by the mercenaries of the "Unionist" emperor Michael VIII (1261-1282), who stole the treasures of the monastery and left only ruins in their wake. Although many writers maintain that Michael never put any pressure on the Athonite community and that there never were hostilities or raids on Athos - much less pillaging and murders of monks - the historical and political conjunction of circumstances in the period lead to different conclusions. In spite of the fact that the history of Athos is marked by the rejection of this emperor who had joined forces with the pope in Rome, those well-versed in history must take into account the fact that Michael clearly saw that the invasion of Byzantium by the Empire's bitter enemy, Charles of Anjou, was dangerously close, and that he would have to seek help from every possible quarter. Thus, while Pope Gregory V did indeed prevent Charles from taking Constantinople with the assistance of the Venetian fleet, he demanded in return the imposition of the Roman Catholic faith on the Byzantine empire. After the Synod of Lyon, where the union of the two churches was decided, the Orthodox Church was obliged to recognize the primacy of the pope, and the emperor was compelled to use his armies, to enforce this "change". Naturally, his efforts were doomed from the start, particularly on Athos, where stories concerning the errors committed by the imperial armies in the service of the worst enemy of Orthodoxy – the Pope – still strike a sensitive chord. This period of incursions was followed by a period of reconstruction which was interrupted by the Fall of Constantinople. At this particular point, however, Xenophontos, too, began to receive the support of the rulers of Moldavia and Wallachia. A number of the members of these royal houses donated enormous sums of money and thus made it possible for the monastery to reconstruct its buildings and to adorn them magnificently. In the apse of the small "old" Katholikon, the date



Phiale by the new Katholikon

1545 has been inscribed, testifying to the year of the church's restoration.

Among the endless list of donors are mentioned the names of many patricians who had also lavished their generosity on other monasteries. We find here again the names of the Dukes Vanik and Radul, Servan, Matthew Constantine Brankovan, Matthew Bessarabas, Rado Leo, Constantine and Nicholas Mavrocordatos, Ghikas, and others.

At that time, the administration of the idiorrhythmic monastery of Xenophontos had been assumed by Serbian and Bulgarian monks. In 1794, by a decree issued by patriarch Gabriel, Xenophontos was declared a coenobitic community and, since that time, thanks to the influx of many new monks, the monastery, whose population had been dwindling dangerously, entered into a new period of prosperity.

The hieromonk Paisios had worked very hard to achieve this swing in the fortunes of the monastery and had contributed, through the donation of large sums of money, to its financial health. A fire, in 1817, destroyed many of the old official documents of Xenophontos. The ravaged buildings were soon repaired, and the construction of the "great" Katholikon was just as quickly completed.

Since then the monastery has had two churches. The old Katholikon, originally the centre of the monastery, today constitutes only a part of the monastic complex. Impressive murals painted by the Cretan artist, Antonios, can still be seen, although they were seriously damaged in 1544 by earthquakes and damp from the sea. The passage between the Katholikon and the old Refectory is adorned with frescoes representing themes from the Apocalypse. Unfortunately, their condition too gives cause for concern. An inscription names as donors the ruler of Wallachia, John Matthaios (1632-1654) and his wife Helen Bessaraba.

The wall paintings of the old Refectory, which date from 1575, were painted over in 1640. The new, larger katholikon was built in 1809-1819 at great expense. It has a marble iconostasis, while the arches and domes of this lofty church are supported by marble columns. This is where the most valuable treasures of the monastery are kept: these include two mosaic icons of St. Demetrius and St. George, dating from the 13th century, and the miracle-working icon of the Virgin Hodegetria, which is a copy of the icon that was destroyed in the Chora monastery at the time of the fall of Constantinople. The icon, which originally belonged to the Vatopedi monastery, came into the possession of Xenophontos in 1730.

Among the 600 manuscripts in the library there are eight written on vellum. Scrolls, official documents and over 7,000 printed books complete the library's collection. As in all the Athonite monasteries, in the treasury of Xenophontos, too, are kept very precious portable icons, crosses, liturgical vessels, holy relics, vestments, as well as a fragment of the True Cross.

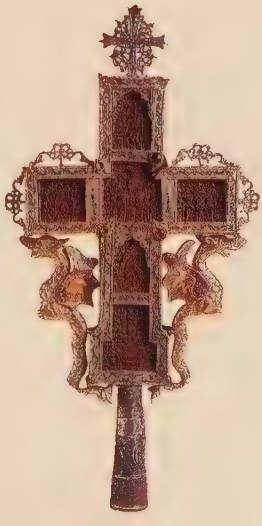
Of the 14 chapels of Xenophontos, eight are inside the monastery precinct. Four of these are adorned with murals. The Skete of the Annunciation belongs to the monastery, but of the 20 Kalyves very few are inhabited today. The feast day of St. George, the patron-saint of the monastery, is celebrated on 23 April.

The Virgin enthroned, surrounded by a choir of Angels – a fresco between the old Katholikon and the Refectory.

pp. 194-195: the Refectory with its superb frescoes.

MONASTERIES OF ATHOS

MONASTERY OF GREGORIOU



MONASTERY OF GREGORIOU

Above the rocks of the western coast, which reach to a height of thirty metres, stands the monastery of Gregoriou, almost halfway between the monasteries of Simonopetra and Dionysiou, at a distance of an hour's walk from each. On the spot where its founder, the Blessed Gregory, laid the foundations of the monastery in 1345, there was probably in antiquity a sanctuary dedicated to Poseidon. Gregory was the initiator of the Hesychast movement, which later shook the Holy Mountain and the entire Byzantine empire to its very foundations. After a lengthy stay in the monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai, Gregory came to Athos and lived in Iviron for a number of years. He then began to occupy himself with the foundation of a monastery and to take an active part in defence of the Hesychast movement, the passionate religious disputation which ended only after his death, with the final victory of the Hesychasts.

The monastery honours as its second founder the monk Gregory of Syria, who in 1400 laid down the rules of monastic life in the monastic community of Gregoriou.

The Moldavian prince, Stephen V Urosh (1355-1367) is recorded as the third founder, since he was a great benefactor during the early years of the monastery's existence.

The first historical records regarding Gregoriou date from 1347 and 1348, when Callistratus and Callistus are mentioned in two official documents as its abbots. The monastery itself first appears in the third Typikon (1394)

ratified by the emperor Manuel II Palaeologus (1391-1425), and is ranked twenty-second in the hierarchy of the 25 Athonite monasteries.

After the fall of Constantinople, Gregoriou, which did not possess any considerable property, suffered serious attacks by the Turkish conquerors and was finally left totally desolate when its monks abandoned it in 1497. Here, too, the rulers of Moldavia and Wallachia appeared as benefactors, restoring the monastery and considerably contributing to the revival of monastic life.

The ruined buildings were rebuilt by Stephen the Great (1457-1504) and his son, Bogdan the One-Eyed (1504-1517), who also made lavish donations towards the furnishing and fitting out of the monastery. All these efforts were wasted, however, as raiding Muslims again pillaged and destroyed the newly-rebuilt monastery. Gregoriou was saved this time by the great voivode Peter Raresh V, benefactor of the entire Holy Mountain, who, together with his son-in-law, the Rumanian prince Alexander Lapusheanu and his wife Roxandra, Stephen's daughter, undertook the restoration of the monastery.

One of the greatest calamities Gregoriou was to suffer was the terrible fire of 1761, which literally razed it to the ground. A large part of its treasure was burnt and most of the buildings were turned into ashes. The monastery was only able to be restored this time thanks to the incredible zeal of its sacristan, Joachim of Acarnania, who, because of his impressive beard was given the nickname of "Makrygenis" (Long-Beard). Joachim, who had been living in Gregoriou since 1740, devoted his entire life to the rebuilding of the abandoned ruins of the monastery. He took advantage of the good will of the powerful Moldo-Wallachian princes and of their friendly disposition towards him, as well as of his connections with influential personages in the Danube states and in places as high as the Sublime Porte itself, to organise fund-raising expeditions throughout the Balkans. He collected money from wealthy Greeks as well as from the faithful in Wallachia, and even the Sultan made a donation for the rebuilding of the monastery. The construction of the Katholikon (1762) and the painting of its murals in 1779 by the Kastorian artists Gabriel and Gregory were made possible thanks to the funds offered by Rumanian nobles.

In 1783 the reconstruction of the monastery, to which the metropolitan bishop of Hungary and Wallachia, Gregory, had also contributed with gifts of considerable sums of money, was finally completed; and the buildings came to look much as they do today. Joachim Makrygenis has since then been honoured as the monastery's fourth founder.

After the end of the Greek War of Independence against the Turks (1830), a new period of construction began for Gregoriou, during which the monastic complex was almost doubled in size. Apart from the new wings with the monks' cells and guest rooms, the monastery at that time acquired its impressive marble entrance.

The Katholikon is dedicated to St. Nicholas, whose feast day is on 6 December. Besides the wall paintings dating from 1779, which are preserved in very good condition, the church has a beautifully carved wooden iconostasis on which are represented Old Testament scenes.

Modern frescoes in the exonarthex.

The faïence decoration in the arches behind the monks' pews is a unique example of its kind.

Among the numerous portable icons, particularly venerated are two icons of the Virgin: the Virgin Galaktrotrophousa dating from the middle of the 15th century, whose halo and that of the Holy Infant are richly adorned with precious stones, and the Virgin Pantanassa which is a copy of an icon destroyed during the fall of Constantinople. An inscription records the donor of the icon, Maria Palaeologina, wife of the Rumanian prince Stephan the Great, to whom the monastery owes its reconstruction in 1497.

The contents of the library have suffered greatly from the fires of the previous centuries, however it still holds 4000 printed books and 279 manuscripts, among which is the only extant manuscript of Ermas in the world. This work, one of the apocryphal books of the Gospel, was written in the 2nd century by a Roman Christian named Ermas, and was very popular in the early centuries of Christianity. In the 19th century an illicit dealer in antiquities, Simonides, stole three of the nine leaves of the manuscript and sold them in Leipzig.

In the treasury many precious documents, icons and relics have been saved from the fires and pillaging: a fragment of the True Cross, holy vestments, Evangelistaria and numerous valuable and lavishly decorated reliquaries, such as those of the two miracle-working saints Cosmas and Damian, of Gregory Nazianzene (372), and of Dionysios the Areopagite.

The ten chapels date from the 18th or 19th centuries and some of them are adorned with beautiful murals. Four Kellia in Karyes are also under the jurisdiction of the monastery of Gregoriou.

In the Katholikon is kept the miracle-working icon of the Virgin Galaktotrophousa

MONASTERY OF ESPHIGMENOU

MONASTERY OF ESPHIGMENOU

The Monastery of Esphigmenou is the first one to present its high defensive walls to the visitor travelling southwards by boat from Ierissos. Its name bears no relation to its natural position, because the monastery is anything but "tightly bound" (*esphigmenos* in Greek) or squeezed between the hills and the shore. More plausible is the story that its founder was a monk whom his contemporaries knew as the monk who wore a very tight cord around his waist.

The monks of Esphigmenou do not mention the name of the Ecumenical Patriach of Constantinople in their orisons, because they consider him too accommodating and conciliatory as regards ecumenical issues and relations with the Roman Catholic Church. This is why they have almost no state funding. However, the monks assure you most convincingly that there is no financial problem in Esphigmenou, as the Virgin has helped them in the past and will continue to do so in the future. Lavish donations from every part of the world encourage them to continue to preserve their faith unalloyed and pure. Orthodoxy or Death, there is no middle road here.

Tradition, obscure and unsubstantiated, tells that the founder of the monastery was Pulcheria, wife of the emperor Marcianus (450-457). The view, however, that the founding of the monastery should be attributed to another Pulcheria, the sister of Romanus II Argyros (1028-1034), seems more plausible, since Esphigmenou is not mentioned in the first Typikon of 971/972 and therefore did not exist in that year. On the other hand, we find it mentioned in an official document dating from 1030, and in the second Typikon of the Holy Mountain,

signed by 29 hegumens and sealed by the emperor Constantine Monomachus in 1045. This Typikon places Esphigmenou in the fifth position in the hierarchy of the Athonite monasteries. Although, in the next thousand years, the monastery lost its place at the top of the formal hierarchy, this in no way affected its standing in the spiritual hierarchy of Athos.

The third version places the founding of the monastery even earlier, and attributes it to Pulcheria, sister of the emperor Theodosius (379-395). Indications in favour of this version are the scant ruins of a wall at a distance of ten minutes from the monastery. Three marble capitals from this supposed original monastery have been incorporated into the walls of the church. However, we must mention here the valid theory that this may have been the site of the ancient town of Olophyxos.

Exposed as the monastery was, on the eastern coasts of the Athos peninsula, it suffered repeatedly from pirate raids, Saracen attacks, pillaging by mercenaries and Catalan troups. These incursions interrupted at intervals the relative quiet and the growth of the monastery. Until the fall of Constantinople, the Monastery of Esphigmenou benefitted from the generous economic support of the Byzantine emperors, as well as from that of many Moldo-Wallachian princes.

In the 14th century a great fire destroyed the monastery almost entirely, but the lavish donations of the Serbian king, Stephen IV, and of the despot George Brankovitch, allowed the monastery to be rebuilt very quickly and to continue to grow in size until 1533 when it was attacked by pirates, who sacked and destroyed a large part of Esphigmenou. The Serb, Rumanian and Russian rulers –Alexander Michailovitch in particular– hastened once again to the monastery's assistance. Russia's relations with Esphigmenou were always very warm and were influenced by the memory of the founder of Russian monasticism, Anthony Petcherski, of Kiev, who in 1051 carried back to his country the strict coenobitic rules he had drawn up in the caves of Samareia, near Esphigmenou. In later years, the Russian tsar, Alexius, allowed the monks of this monastery to collect funds every five years on his territories.

In 1811, the metropolitan bishop Gregory V, who had resigned from his office and

retired to Esphigmenou as a simple monk, gave the monastery a new spiritual impetus. The monastery had already become coenobitic since 1797, and this landmark in its spiritual history also became the starting-point for its financial prosperity. In 1810 the Katholikon was rebuilt, and in 1851-1858 the eastern and western wings of the monastery were erected. The damage caused by the Turks during the War of Independence was repaired immediately after the end of the struggle, and many of the Rumanian monks who had sought refuge in the monastery returned to their respective countries in the following years.

The Katholikon, which was built in 1806-1810, was inaugurated in 1811 by Gregory. In 1817 the painters Zacharias, Benjamin and Makarios painted the sanctuary frescoes, while in 1841 the painters Gerasimos, Anthimos, Jehoshaphat and Nicephorus decorated the walls and the ceiling of the narthex. The gilded wooden iconostasis is considered to be one of the most beautiful on the Holy Mountain. The murals of the Refectory have lost their brilliance, because of the thin layer of soot deposited by the fires lit by Turkish troops during the Greek War of Independence.

On the bell tower in the courtyard is a clock with Arabic and Roman numerals as well as with Greek and Turkish symbols. This work of art was created by Viennese craftsmen.

An important part of the Library's collection was destroyed by fires and raids. However, 372 manuscripts and about 2,000 incunabula have been preserved. Among the 75 manuscripts on vellum there are some particularly precious works, such as the very richly illuminated *menologion*, codex No.14. It measures 38 x 26 cm, and in its 452 crimson pages there are about 80 representations of the lives of saints, of the Nativity, the three Magi before Herod, the Flight into Egypt

etc. This codex is one of three volumes, each of which relates to one third of the ecclesiastical year, which begins on the 1st of September.

It was in 1844 at Esphigmenou that the French archaeologist Adolphe Napoléon Didron discovered the "Painter's Manual" by the monk Dionysius of Fourna, which offers guidelines for the technique of iconography. After long negotiations, the sultan finally granted a painter-monk permission to copy the manual, so that the copy, at least, could circulate outside the monastery. One of these copies first made its appearance in 1845 in Paris, and then in 1855, in Germany.

In the treasury are kept liturgical vessels, seals, documents, as well as holy relics. Together with these, a piece of gold-embroidered fabric is preserved which, once a year, on the feast day of the Ascension, is used as the veil of the Royal Door in the Katholikon. This cloth, measuring 2.8 x 3 m, is said to have come from the tent of Napoleon and was a gift of Gregory V, when he was ordained metropolitan bishop. Another valuable work of art is the small 14th-century mosaic icon of Christ (14 x 7 cm) in a silver frame with representations of the Apostles and inlaid fragments of holy relics.

There are eight chapels within the monastery precinct and, of the five which are situated outside the monastery walls, particularly important is the little church dedicated to Anthony Petcherski, who lived on Athos for ten years. In 1050, the abbot Theodosios sent him to the Ukraine to spread the Word of God. There Petcherski founded several monastic communities among which the famous Lavra of the Caves in Kiev.

pp. 210-211: ***The monks tried to defend their Monastery by erecting mighty walls, and their hearts by raising a wall of virtue.***

MONASTERY OF ST. PANTELEIMON

MONASTERY OF ST. PANTELEIMON

An hour's walk away from Daphne to the north, on the western coast of Athos, lies the group of buildings of the Monastery of St. Panteleimon. On the lower side, by the sea, stand the impressive and extensive six-storeyed wings housing the guest rooms which were once able to accommodate almost 2,000 pilgrims, but which today are falling into ruin. Behind these wings and covering a verdant plateau at the foot of the hills that slope down towards the sea, rise the variform buildings of the monastery, with their coloured domes.

Panteleimon ("all-merciful") was the name his contemporaries gave a physician, whose actual name was Pantaleon. His envious colleagues denounced the Christian physician serving at the court of Nicomedia to Maximian, who, at the time (284-305), was ruling jointly with Diocletian, upon which Maximian immediately ordered him to be tortured and beheaded.

The monastery we see today and which was built on this site on the coast in 1765, is not the original one - which lies half an hour's walk away and is now known as the Paleomonástiro. The old monastery of St. Panteleimon, which was also known as "Thessalonikeos", was founded in the 11th century but was abandoned a few decades later .

During that same period, around 1030, a group of Russian monks, together with their hegumen, Laurentius, had established themselves in the little monastery of Xylourgou. However, as this monastic community grew larger, the *Protos* and the Holy Assembly of the Holy Mountain decided to cede to it, in 1168, the ownership and administration of

the ruined Monastery of St. Panteleimon. The little monastery of Xylourgou diminished in importance and later became the Skete of the Bogoroditsa.

Unfortunately, we know very little concerning the monastery of St. Panteleimon in the 12th and 13th centuries, because all its historical documents were destroyed in a huge fire. The first confirmed testimony we have concerning the proprietary status of the monastery of St. Panteleimon Thessalonikeos, is contained in a chrysobull of the emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus (1282-1328).

Until 1497 the hegumen of the monastery signed documents in Greek, which attests to the fact that the majority of monks in the community at that time were Greeks. John V Palaeologus and his successor Manuel II provided generous assistance to St. Panteleimon, as did the Serb rulers Stephen Dushan and his successors, all of whom, up to George I Brankovitch, made very important donations to the monastery, thus ensuring its constant development until the 15th century.

The Tatar incursions into Russia, in 1237, caused a significant decrease in the influx of Russian monks, as a result of which the monastic community at that time was composed of Greeks and Serbs. However, after the liberation of Russia the number of Russian monks began once more to increase, and the gifts of the Russian tsars in the early years of the 16th century brought new prosperity to the monastery.

Some decades later, a financial crisis broke out, which the monastery was not able to surmount, in spite of the financial support provided by various rulers and, in 1626, the central administration of the Holy Mountain assumed the management of the monastery. Nonetheless, the economic decline continued, and the monastery was finally obliged to mortgage not only its lands but its ecclesiastical treasures as well.

The Russian traveller, Barski, records that in 1730 he only met two Russian and two Bulgarian monks in the monastery. Not much later, in 1735, the administration of St. Panteleimon passed into the hands of the Greeks, and the Greek hegumen decided to erect a new monastery on another site. Thus, in 1765, Greek and Russian monks began to build the new monastery on the coast, on the site where had stood, since 1676, a small monastery founded by the bishop of Ierissos, Christopher.

The inscription above the entrance of the church "*..called Russian..*", dates from this period. The construction and the luxurious furnishings of this new monastery of the Russians were paid for, in the main, by the Phanariot hospodar of Moldo-Wallachia, Scarlatos Callimaches, who had the katholikon built between 1812 and 1821. However, already in 1821, the majority of the monks had left the monastery in order to take part in the Greek War of Independence, which ended in 1830. At this time the Russian influence increased, because when the monks returned to their now ruined monastery after the War, the debts of the community, added to the claims of the sultan for financial reparations, had reached such astronomical heights that it had become impossible to pay them from the monastery funds. Moreover, the financial assistance of the Danube states had ceased and it was only the Russian tsars who were able to support the monastery and to

encourage the flow of monks to St. Panteleimon. Thus, in 1839, a constantly increasing number of Russian monks came to St. Panteleimon, which resulted in the election of a Russian abbot for the first time in 1875. In 1895, over 1,000 Russian monks lived in St. Panteleimon, and in 1909 this figure reached 1,446. In the next 20 years the monastery was able to reduce its debt to the Turkish government by a million piastres.

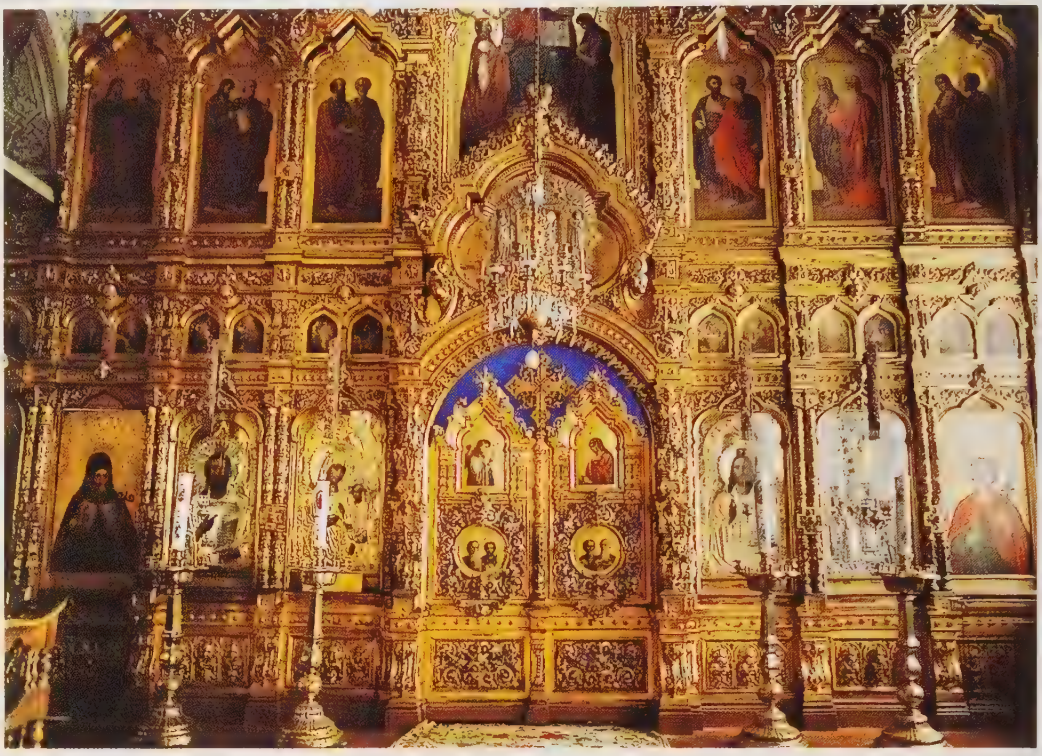
Since 1869 the hegumen of the monastery of St. Panteleimon has been a Russian and the service is sung in both languages. The Tsars allotted enormous sums of money for the extension of the monastery, as well as for the many sketes of the Holy Mountain inhabited by Russian monks.

The monastery gradually assumed the dimensions of a town, which could house not only the 1,000 monks but also 2,000 visitors. An enormous area was transformed into a kitchen and, in 1888, on the fourth floor of the wing housing the monks' cells, a large church was built in the Muscovite architectural style. Workshops were created with modern steam-powered machinery from Vienna, and also a hospital and a bell tower in which, together with the other 33 smaller bells, hangs the gigantic bell, fashioned in 1897, which was a gift from the Tsar. A photography workshop was also set up, a hostel for pilgrims, storerooms and a printing press, the publications of which circulated not only locally, but in Russia itself as well.

After the Soviets came into power, the influx of new monks from Russia ceased. Time passed, the members of the monastic community aged, and their number decreased. The monks, who were by now quite elderly, lived under the threat of the total collapse of the monastery. Fortunately, events unexpectedly took a completely different turn. The first step was taken when four young monks, after many years of preparation, obtained permission to leave Russia, and to retire to Athos. Immediately afterwards came the period of *perestroika* in the Soviet Union, which was accompanied by the more liberal attitude in matters of religion adopted by Gorbatchev, as a result of which more Russian monks were able to come and settle in St. Panteleimon. In recent years the monastery has once again begun to grow and the monks are now able to face the future with optimism.

The old katholikon in the courtyard of the monastery was built in 1811-1821 and is dedicated to St. Panteleimon, whose feast day is on 27 July. Murals in the Russian style of painting adorn the interior walls. The carved wooden iconostasis is also an example of Russian art. The eight green domes of varying sizes, surmounted by yellow onion-shaped terminals and topped by large golden crosses lend the church a distinctive appearance. The Refectory was built in 1892, was painted in 1897 and can accommodate over 1,000 visitors. Above the Refectory rises the belfry with the many bells, among which the Tsar's great bell reigns supreme. Even the phiale is completely different from the others on the Holy Mountain.

The gilded iconostasis of the church of the Holy Refuge (Aghia Skepi) (1888), in the northern wing of the monastery.



In spite of the fires of the past centuries, a large number of books in the Slavonic and Greek languages are preserved in the library. Apart from the 25,000 printed books there are 1,920 manuscripts (1320 in Greek and 600 in Slavonic). The codices which have been preserved here, such as cod. 6, an illuminated homily by Gregory, adorned with miniatures depicting themes from mythology, or cod. 2, an extremely valuable gem-encrusted Evangelistarion of Byzantine origin, are of superlative quality. Relics, vestments, holy relics and other treasures, as well as numerous portable icons, are gifts of the tsars and of other members of the Russian nobility. Besides the fragment of the True Cross, many crosses, reliquaries and icons such as the icon of the Virgin, from Jerusalem, and that of St. John the Baptist are also kept here.

Honoured above all others, however, is the miracle-working icon of St. Panteleimon, in the new church of the monastery.

According to tradition, this icon comes from the first small monastic settlement of Xylourgou, founded in 1030. In the gold revetment which covers the icon and leaves only the face of the Saint and those of the figures surrounding him uncovered, there are 14 sections with representations of miracles, as well as scenes of the martyrdom of the great healer-saint.

In the vast precinct of the monastery are scattered 25 chapels, many of them topped by the characteristic Russian domes. Two of the five Kellia of the monastery are in Karyes while, of its Sketes, that of Thebais has been abandoned and that of Bogoroditsa, near Pantocrator, is today inhabited by monks.

Decree of the Empress Anna Ivanova, 1730.

Anthology of canticles, 19th c.

Almanac, 1814.

MONASTERY OF KASTAMONITOU

MONASTERY OF KASTAMONITOU

On the northwestern side of the Athos peninsula, stands the Monastery of Kastamonitou. It lies at a short distance from the monastery of Docheiariou, without being directly linked to it, since a relatively high, steep and inaccessible mountain peak separates the one monastery from the other. The Kastamonitou monastery is built at the end of a fertile valley, which rises gently southwards among orchards and olive groves,with solemn century-old cypresses standing guard around it. In order to reach the monastery from the little harbour, one must follow an uphill road for about half an hour through barren fields of hard, rocky soil, in which a few olive trees grow sparsely. Then the landscape changes, the road turns into a beautiful old cobbled path that leads the visitor through a cool wood of chestnut trees until, another half hour later, the monastery appears among the vineyards and the orchards.

The monks tell many stories about the foundation of the monastery, but none of these can be confirmed, since all the relevant documents have been destroyed. The first story tells of the construction, in the 4th century, by the emperor Constantine the Great and his son Constantius (337-361), of a church, around which the bishop, Makarios (†408), later founded the monastery. Although Constantius' monastery is indeed mentioned in the third

Typikon, this version remains debatable historically.

Other sources link the foundation of Kastamonitou to a monk from Kastamoni in Asia Minor and it is said that he built the monastery on a site which may have been that of the ancient city of Thyssos.

The first substantiated testimony on the existence of the monastery dates from the late 11th century, and is to be found in a document of 1097, which mentions the name of the hegumen Hilarion Kastamonitis (possibly the founder of the monastery). Together with four other Athonite abbots, Hilarion went to the emperor Alexius I Comnenus, in Constantinople, to appeal for his support when the Ecumenical Patriarch Nicholas III Grammatikos disowned the Holy Mountain because permission had been given to Vlach nomads - among which were a number of women - to enter and to stay in the area of Mt. Athos.

In 1288, the Catalan mercenaries of the Unionist Patriarch Bekkus and the armies of the emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus were responsible for much of the destruction suffered by the monastery. This, however, was soon repaired thanks to the extremely generous donations of the emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus. Considerable, too, was the financial assistance offered by the princess of Serbia, Anna the Philanthropene. The monastery also received support from the emperor Manuel II Palaeologus (1391-1425), as well as from the Serbian prince George Brankovitch, when it was ravaged by a disastrous fire at the time of the Council of Florence, the aim of which was the union of the two churches (1438-42). The Serbian general Raditch also donated considerable amounts of money at that time, before resigning from his office and retiring to the monastery as a monk under the name of Romanos. The period of prosperity of Kastamonitou ended when the Ottoman Turks conquered the capital of the Byzantine empire and the Athonite monasteries were obliged to pay a poll tax.

One hundred years later, Kastamonitou was once again devastated by a great fire and its sorry situation was aggravated by the severe crisis in its finances. The monastery's debts had reach such astronomic proportions that it was almost impossible for it to continue to exist. The Archbishop of Samos records, with regard to this period, that in 1666 he found there only six monks.

Kastamonitou's decline was uncontrollable. Donations had stopped coming in, and, in 1722, its monks abandoned it. In 1799, a glimmer of hope suddenly appeared for Kastamonitou, when patriarch Neophytos made a courageous effort to revive it by turning it into a coenobitic monastery. In the following years new benefactors appeared, such as Kyra Vassiliki, the Greek wife of Ali Pasha (1788-1822), who donated considerable sums of money to the hegumen. An Evangelistarion, offered by her, is preserved in the sanctuary of the church. With the money provided by Kyra Vassiliki some of the ruined buildings were rebuilt. After 1853, however, the monastery's situation began to improve thanks to the initiative and resourcefulness of Symeon of Stageira.

Symeon donated 80,000 piastres to Kastamonitou, and after he came to live in

The kitchen of the "archontaris" (Guest Master), where pilgrims are received and entertained.

the monastery where he was later to become a hegumen, he instituted annual fund-raising expeditions to Russia (1862-1869), thanks to which he was able to collect such huge amounts of money that the monastery's debts were repaid and the construction of a new katholikon made possible. The new church was dedicated to St. Stephen, whose feast day it celebrates on 27 December. Symeon of Stageira was ordained bishop and, thanks to the support of the Archimandrite, Meletios, he was able to restore the entire monastic complex.

The interior walls of the katholikon, built in 1860-1867 over the ruins of the older church, have not been painted. The iconostasis and the floor are made of marble.

The library counts among its 110 manuscripts 14 parchments, and over 1,000 incunabula. In the treasury there are numerous official documents, gold and silver seals, a fragment of the True Cross, carved wooden crosses, liturgical vessels and holy vestments. Particular mention must be made of the Evangelistaria, such as the Evangelistarion of Kyra Vassiliki, which are bound in precious covers. Among the monastery's numerous icons, three are miracle-working: the first is the icon of St. Stephen, probably dating from the 8th century, which measures 1.2 x 0.7 m and one end of which is slightly charred.

A typical meal - tasty bean soup, tomato salad and, for desert, stewed pears with honey and cinamon.

According to tradition, during the time of the emperor Alexius I, that is, during the iconoclastic struggles, the icon travelled across the sea and came from Jerusalem to Athos. Concerning the second icon, that of the Virgin Antiphonitria, the story is that once, on the eve of the feast day of St. Stephen, when the lamps in the church had run out of oil, the jar underneath the icon was filled miraculously with oil and the celebration was held with all due magnificence. The jar is preserved to this day in Kastamonitou. The third icon is a duplicate of the Virgin Hodegetria (the original icon was destroyed), and is a gift of the princess Anna the Philanthropene.

Among the treasures of the monastery, particularly venerated are the holy relics of St. Stephen, of the emperor and saint, Constantine the Great, of St. Panteleimon, of Saints Cosmas and Damian, and of the Apostle Andrew. Of the nine chapels, four are situated within the monastery precinct. Among them is the chapel of the Virgin where the miracle-working icon of the Virgin Portaitissa is kept behind the carved wooden iconostasis. The monastery has a kelli in Karyes, where resides its representative in the capital.

Pages 228-229: ***The large skete of St. John the Baptist, in the south-eastern corner of the Athos peninsula.***

SKETES AND KELLIA

Not all the monks on the Holy Mountain live in the main monasteries or in the capital town of Karyes. Already since the time of Athanasius the Athonite, who gathered together some of the existing small monastic communities, the *lavres*, under the monastery of the Great Lavra – the first main monastery on Athos – many monks lived in small organized monastic communities, united in work and prayer. The hermits, on the contrary, always lived and prayed independently of the monasteries, in their humble *kalyves* or in caves. On the Holy Mountain there are about 20 sketes, which are larger settlements built around a church, the "*Kyriakós naós*".

Essentially, the Sketes differ from the Kellia in the manner of their organization. The Skete is governed and administered by the *Dikaios* together with the Council of the *Sympraktores*, who are elected by the assembly of all the monks of the Skete. The office of the Dikaios is assumed in turn by the elders of the Kalyves belonging to the Skete. In contrast to the Sketes, the Kellia are administered by the monk recognised as the elder of each particular kelli by its parent monastery.

Among the most renowned of the many Kellia is the "Axion Esti", at half an hour's walking distance from Karyes. Particularly interesting, because of its history, is the Russian Kelli known as "Abitel", which belongs to the Chelandari monastery. The Kelli dates from the time of St. Sabbas, the founder of Chelandari. and is dedicated to St. Ignatius. A large number of buildings were constructed here thanks to the support of the Russians, with extensive wings for guests, a huge kitchen and grand reception areas, as well as many workshops. This was where the centre of the "brotherhood" of the Russian Athonite monks was created. All this magnificence was lost in a fire in 1905 and the Kelli was never again able to recover its former grandeur.

Although the sketes and kellia depend on a specific parent monastery they are, to a certain degree, self-governing. They are often called upon to provide the monastery with the product of their labours, such as fruit and vegetables, in return for which they obtain any goods which they themselves are not able to produce. The monks of these 'dependencies' often visit their monasteries, especially on the great feast-days of their patron saints.

Of the Holy Mountain's Sketes, some, such as that of St. Anne, dating from 1007, are very old, while others such as the "Serail", the Skete constructed with funds provided by Tsar Alexander II, were once huge, but are today in ruins.

SKETE OF THE PROPHET ELIJAH

The Russo-Ukrainian Skete of the Prophet Elijah dominates a wooded mountain slope half an hour's distance away from the monastery of the Pantocrator to which it belongs. It offers a unique view towards the eastern coast of Athos where, more often than not, the seas are very rough. The Skete, which was once the third in rank as regards its numbers of Russian monks after that of St. Panteleimon and the ruined Serail, was founded by the monk Paisios. In 1759, around a small Kelli, this monk established a Skete large enough to house 150 monks. As soon as the first buildings were completed, there was a great influx of monks from Russia and the hegumen Paisios found himself in a very difficult situation. Russia's financial assistance had stopped and there was therefore no one to guarantee the livelihood of the Skete that had been entrusted to him. Apart from its financial difficulties, there were also bitter disputes with the Pantocrator monastery, from which Paisios had leased the land on which to build his Skete. When relations between the Skete and Pantocrator were finally severed in 1763, Paisios left Athos with another 100 monks and went to Moldavia. He never returned to the Skete, which after a few years was abandoned and fell into ruin.

In 1841, Paisios II, a very dynamic Bulgarian monk who lived as a hermit near the Kafsokalyvia Skete, managed to bring new life to the skete of the Prophet Elijah. Paisios imposed absolute adherence to the exceedingly strict regulations which he himself had devised, and this may perhaps, to a great degree, have accounted for the fact that very soon the Skete had become a shining example for others.

The earthquakes that struck the area at that time wreaked great havoc, however, and it became necessary to rebuild some of the edifices –the church in particular– from the start. The duchess Alexandra of Russia expressed the wish to lay the foundation stone herself, but as even she was not exempt from the "*abaton*" - the prohibition to all women to set foot on the Holy Mountain – admiral Golobatchov had to take her place for the ceremony.

Soon the dream began to take shape and the Skete began to flourish greatly. A new refectory was built, as well as numerous chapels, a hospital and the bell tower. Modern techniques were introduced, such as those adopted by St. Panteleimon, and the monks now ground their grain in an engine-driven mill. Thanks to the very generous donations from Russia, the large church was adorned magnificently. Of its

icons, particularly worthy of mention is the icon of the Virgin Dakryrrhoousa (the Weeping Virgin). In February 1877 the deacon noticed tears flowing from the eyes of the Virgin. He called the Dikaios and the other monks, who dried her tears, but new tears kept welling up from the Virgin's eyes.

The struggles of the Greeks against the Turks did not affect the Skete seriously, as the Russian monks had not taken part in the War; after the Russian revolution, however, the Skete of the Prophet Elijah lost all hope. The monastic community dwindled, since Russian monks were no longer allowed to leave Russia. When, 60 years later, the last Russian Dikaios died, the hopes of the community were centred on monks of Russian origin who had never lived in Russia.

SKETE OF ST. ANDREW

Very near Karyes, to the northeast, the impressive Skete of St. Andrew, also known as Serail, has slowly been falling into ruin ever since the death of the last Russian monk. This grand building complex, approximately one kilometre in length, once comprised numerous chapels, huge wings for the monks and guests, as well as an imposing church which stood out among all the other edifices.

The Skete has come once again under the jurisdiction of the monastery of Vatopedi, since the land on which it is stands belongs to that monastery. Today it reminds one of an empty shell that once contained great treasures.

The tsar Alexander II Nikolayevitch (1855-1881), who later was the victim of a bomb attack by an anarchist, was the target of several such terrorist attacks throughout his lifetime. In Paris, in 1867, the Tsar was lucky - an attempt to murder him failed. In gratitude for his deliverance, he decided to donate a church to the Holy

Mountain, on the site where a Russian Kelli had stood since the 18th century. This Kelli, which had replaced the small Monastery of Xystrou, was founded by Patriarch Athanasius, but its edifices were completed several decades later by Patriarch Seraphim. Around 1841, the Kelli was sold to the Russian monks Bessarion and Barsanufius, who were able to give it new vigour. Thanks to the enormous sums of money sent by the grateful tsar Alexander, there was a surge of building activity which, however, did not include the construction of the church. This was only completed a decade later, a year before the violent death of its

founder. The church compares with no other in the southern territories of Orthodoxy, either in terms of size or lavishness of decoration; it appears to the visitor of today, however - if, of course, he has been able to obtain permission to visit the church -, as but a pale reflection of its past glory. The last tsar of Russia, Nicholas II Alexandrovitch (1894-1917), of the Romanoff family, had considered himself personally responsible for the realisation of the final form of the Skete, and had accordingly disbursed great amounts of money out of his own purse. The Skete attained such a size that it could easily rival many of the main monasteries on Athos. But it was renowned also for the austere ascetic spirit with which its monastic community was imbued.

The miracle-working icon of the Virgin "Comforter of the afflicted", which had been presented as a gift to the *Dikaios* of the Skete, Bessarion, in 1869, attracted tens of thousands of pilgrims from Russia, as well as the Romanoffs themselves. The holy icon was taken on several occasions to Russia, in the years between 1860 and 1880, and during these "journeys" many were the miracles which are said to have taken place.

The central dome of the church is 29 metres high while the impressive bell tower next to it rises to a height of 58 metres. This edifice, which today still shows vestiges of its former grandeur, has begun to fall into ruin. The Skete of St. Andrew never achieved official recognition as a monastery by the administration of the Holy Mountain. Although, in 1910, it had been granted the position of "Great Skete", this huge settlement had always been under the jurisdiction of the Monastery of Vatopedi.

E. Feigl very vividly describes the Skete's wealth: ".. thousands of valuable icons, often adorned with precious jewels, an iconostasis lavishly decorated with gold, chandeliers weighing several tons and luxurious carpets, must have once given the katholikon a truly magnificent and resplendent appearance !.. The church with its main dome and the five smaller ones around it, with its belfry, stairway, conches and balconies, was built according to a characteristic 19th-century style combining neo-Gothic, neo-Baroque and Byzantine elements". The building complex - a veritable "monastic city" that once housed over 500 Russian monks - was equipped in the same way as the regular monasteries. It had everything it needed, from vast storage rooms to a splendid library of 20,000 volumes (which was haplessly destroyed in 1958, as was the western wing of the Skete, by a terrible fire). A part of the southern buildings of the Skete houses the Athonite School, a religious seminary that provides learning to students from all over Greece and prepares them for the priesthood.

Apart from the two huge Sketes of the Prophet Elijah and of St. Andrew, a large number of monks live in many smaller settlements, among which we shall mention here those that are better known.

To avoid the "noisy" life of the Monastery many hermits retreat to the isolation of the hesychasteria.

SKETE OF ST. ANNE AND SKETE OF LITTLE ST. ANNE

The most widely scattered Skete on the Holy Mountain is also the most venerable and the oldest, dating, as it does, to 1007. The "Village of St. Anne", as well as its offshoot, the "Skete of Little St. Anne" which lies in the region of the Desert, one hour away, is built at an altitude of 400 metres. It is near the Monastery of St. Paul, on a slope of Mt. Athos which, on its western side, becomes a precipitous rock, dropping straight down into the sea. Many of its 50 Kalyves are uninhabited today.

The "village", which comes under the jurisdiction of the Great Lavra, was founded by the abbot Eustathios. In 1320 its monks abandoned the Skete and it remained desolate until 1572, when a handful of hermit monks came to settle here. Some decades later, Patriarch Dionysios, who during his time in office (1671-1694) was forced to resign five times owing to political developments, retreated here, and completed the construction of the Skete.

The *Kyriakós naós*, dedicated to St. Anne, the mother of the Virgin, was built in 1752 and its interior was painted in 1757. It counts, among the numerous holy relics in its possession, a reliquary containing the left foot of St. Anne.

Today many goldsmiths and other artist-monks live in the Skete, fulfilling commissions received from Athens and Thessalonike. Their work is famous and highly regarded among artistic circles.

SKETE OF KAFSOKALYVIA

This small settlement, clinging to a green mountain slope on the southeastern coast of Mt. Athos, resembles a small dream village in the Alps, if one excepts the rocks rising, steep and forbidding from the sea to prop up the mountain. Because of its situation, Kafsokalyvia, which is a dependency of the Great Lavra, does not have a boatyard.

The name of the Skete ("burnt huts") maintains alive the memory of the hermit monk Maximus, who lived here in the 14th century and who, each time he moved from one *kalyva* to another in order to devote himself to prayer in a different spot, burnt down his old kalyva so as not to become attached to his worldly shelter and forget his true homeland in heaven.

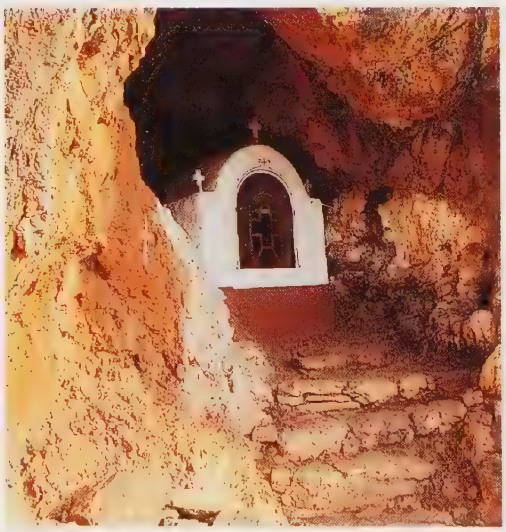
Today the monks live in small, well-designed stone cottages and are employed in a variety of occupations. Apart from the artist-monks who paint icons, there are many wood-carvers and tailors.

The Skete's second name, which, however, is very seldom used, is the Skete of the Holy Trinity, to which the church is dedicated. The church was built in 1765 and its interior was painted in the late 18th century. It enjoyed the patronage of patriarch Joachim III, who often visited this beloved Skete of his, when he was obliged to interrupt his time of office in Constantinople in the years between 1878 and 1912. It was he, moreover, who provided the funds for the construction of the great belfry, which was surrounded by carefully tended gardens. After the Crimean war, Russian monks built elaborate churches in the Kalyvia, such as those of St. George and of St. John the Baptist.

SKETE OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

A walk of almost three hours, up and down a rocky path, leads the visitor from Kafsokalyvia to the Skete of St. John the Baptist, which also belongs to the monastery of the Great Lavra. The skete, dedicated to the "Forerunner" (Prodromos) of Christ, is built 250 metres above the extreme southeasterly point of the peninsula, on the Akrathos cape. On the site of the present Skete, where today a handful of Rumanian monks live very frugally and humbly, there used to stand a small kelli, founded by a Rumanian hermit for monks from his homeland.

After the calamities suffered by the Skete during the Greek War of Independence, the situation began to improve when two prosperous monks from Moldavia, Neson and Nectarios from Jassy, bought the settlement, on the advice of the Metropolitan Bishop Sophronios, and expanded it to a Skete, which was later recognized by a document signed by the Patriarch of Constantinople. It was at this time that the edifices surrounding the courtyard were built. In the middle of the courtyard stands the main church, dedicated to St. John the Baptist. Grants of money from Moldavia, as well as financial support from Jassy, helped to pay for the completion of the edifices. One of the greatest treasures preserved by the Skete is a miracle-working icon, "not made by human hands". According to tradition, in 1863, the monks commissioned the artist, George, to paint an icon of the Virgin, as the Skete could not afford to buy an older icon. George had almost finished his task, but was unable to paint the face of the Virgin, because each time he approached the icon, his hand did not respond to his bidding and began to shake. The monk decided to devote some time to repentance for his sins, because he believed that this was the reason why the Virgin rejected him. However, while the artist was in retirement, seeking the purification of his soul, the icon miraculously appeared completed, without the intervention of human hands. In the Skete are also preserved other treasures, holy relics of St. John the Baptist, St. Clement, and St. Demetrius, and of Minos and other martyrs.

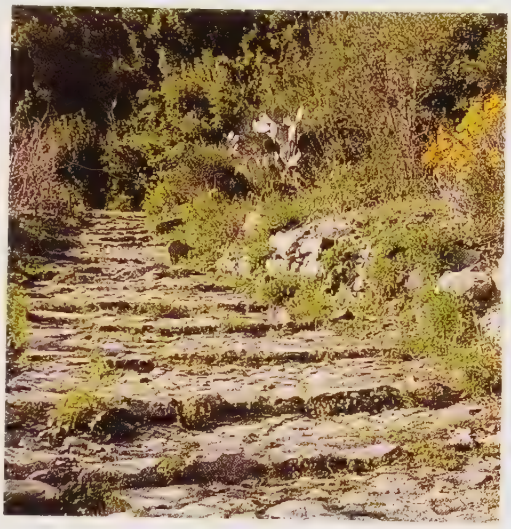


A small kelli in the cave of the Resurrection near the Skete of the Prodromos.

SKETE OF ST. DEMETRIUS

A road leading from the Vatopedi monastery southwards brings one in half an hour to the Skete of St. Demetrius, which lies among fruit trees in an idyllic valley. The chapel, in the most venerable Kalyva of the 21 belonging to the settlement, is said to be over one thousand years old, while most of the buildings were constructed much later. In 1628, following the visit of archimandrite Makarios of Vatopedi to tsar Michael Feodorovitch in Moscow, the Skete entered a period of great prosperity thanks to the donations it received from Vatopedi. The construction of a church, with murals painted in 1755, marked the high point of this development, but today the church has been abandoned and is falling into ruin.

The monks of this Skete, which belongs to the Vatopedi Monastery, are mainly employed in icon-painting. The library contains 73 manuscripts and 200 printed books.



NEA SKETE

On the road leading southwards from the monastery of St. Paul along the rocky coast, before arriving at the Skete of St. Anne, the traveller comes upon the Nea Skete. This "new" settlement, also know as the Skete of the Tower, is under the jurisdiction of the monastery of St. Paul. It was founded in 1760 by the Moldavian monk, Daniel, on a site where the discovery of various coins and finds from sarcophagi indicates that there was once an ancient settlement. The Tower, which was erected at some time by the monks from St. Paul's, now dominates the scene on the northern borders of the settlement. Daniel had named it the Skete of the Virgin. It consists today of 30 single or double-storeyed edifices, and the name it now bears was adopted in the 19th century. The buildings in the centre of the Skete were constructed shortly afterwards, thanks to money provided by the metropolitan bishop Theophanes. The Skete gradually grew in importance and eventually many prominent personalities of Orthodoxy, among which the philosopher Cyril, the Blessed Nicodemus Aghiorites from Naxos and other high-ranking prelates, chose it as their retreat. The church was completed in 1757, but the chapel next to it bears an inscription with the date 1901. The library contains many books and approximately 200 manuscripts, while the treasury holds holy relics, finely-carved wooden croses, vestments and icons.

SKETE TOU LAKKOU

Almost halfway between Karakallou and the Great Lavra, the road along the eastern coast branches out and a smaller road leads inland. At its end, one hour's walk away, stands the Skete tou Lakkou, also known as the Rumanian Skete of St. Demetrius. There is another approach to the Skete by a path that passes over the mountain tops, linking the Skete with the monastery of St. Paul, four hours away; however, this path is difficult to find even today, when a wide road linking St. Paul's with Philotheou has been opened. The idiorrhythmic Skete tou Lakkou which belongs to the monastery of St. Paul, was founded - or rather came into being – as a result of the expansion of a small Kelli which stood on this spot in the 18th century. It is inhabited today by a handful of Rumanian monks.

SKETE OF THE BOGORODITSA
OR "OF THE CARPENTER"

Bulgarian monks inhabit not only the monastery of Zographou, but also the Skete of the Bogoroditsa, built on the eastern slopes of Mt. Athos between Vatopedi and Pantocrator. A number of priests from Russia most probably settled here in the middle of the 11th century, which explains the fact that the emperor Alexius Comnenus later donated the Skete to Russian monks. For quite a long time relations were very close between the Skete and the monastery of Esphigmenou, where the Saint and founder of Russian monasticism, Anthony Petcherski from Kiev, assumed the monastic habit. It is also probable that the monks who lived here worked as carpenters hence the name of "Xylourgos" (carpenter). In 1142 the Skete began to expand and finally was elevated to the rank of monastery, but even then it was not able to meet the needs of the Russian monks who flocked to the monastery in great numbers at that time. Thus, in 1169, 27 Athonite hegumens, under the Protepistates John, decided to cede to the Russian monastic community headed by the hegumen Laurentius, the small monastery which stood in the woods and was dedicated to Thessalonikeus and to the miracle-working saint, Panteleimon. Over the now deserted monastery of the "Xylourgos" silence fell once more and the monastery shrank to a hermitic Skete until 1818, when Bulgarian monks came to settle here and gave it the name of Bogoroditsa, which it holds today.

NEW THEBAIS

High up on the northern side of the west coast of Athos, on a verdant hill, New Thebais, now an extensive ruin, faces the sea. It was once the fourth largest building compound established by Russian monks, but since no new monks have been arriving, it has begun to fall into decay.

There are also several small settlements scattered here and there among the forests of the Holy Mountain, but they have been abandoned by their inhabitants and, now desolate, are crumbling. The region of Monoxylites to the northwest is situated in the forest and is only occasionally inhabited by monks who come to live here as woodcutters or as labourers tilling the lands of the Dionysiou monastery. The Chromitsa Skete was a Russian settlement, on the borders of Mt. Athos, near Ouranoupolis. The name of the now deserted settlement refers to the deposits of chromium which, however, were never extensively exploited.

THE DESERT

There are four settlements which surround the southernmost point of the Holy Mountain, the Nymphaion cape. They are built on precipitous rocks at altitudes sometimes exceding 800 metres. The desert area of Karoulia is situated on the rocky coast at half an hour's distance from the Skete of Little St. Anne and, approximately 400 metres higher, are perched the Katounakia. At a distance of half an hour's walk to the east is built the old Skete of St. Basil, at a height of 600 metres, and finally, 800 metres above the southern side of the east coast, on a stretch of level land on the edge of a ravine overlooking the sea, stands Kerassiá.

THE KAROULIA

The famous Karoulia on the northern side of the cape offer a spectacular view. Among rocks that often drop vertically down to the sea, the anchorites built their huts in clefts and on small ledges on the cliff face. The name of Karoulia is very appropriate, since the hermits who live and pray here in total isolation, literally between the sky and the sea, use ropes and pulleys ("karoulia") to haul up the baskets holding their frugal provisions from the boats below.

THE KATOUNAKIA

Just a little higher than this awe-inspiring settlement, are built the Katounakia, on a wider stretch of level ground on the rock, on the southwestern slopes of Mt. Athos - one of the most beautiful spots on the Holy Mountain. Here live and work painter-monks and among them the Danielites, the spiritual sons of Daniel who, in 1875, established on this lonely spot an *hesychasterion*, a retreat for contemplation and prayer. Although he had chosen isolation, Daniel corresponded with outstanding spiritual figures, such as the abbess Theodo-

ra, who later provided the funds for the construction of the marble tomb of this hermit in the hesychasterion. After the death of its founder, the hesychasterion developed into one of the schools of icon painting on Athos that follow the rules laid down by the *Hermeneia*, "The Painter's Manual". At an altitude of 500 metres, the huts of the Katounakia, which belong to the Great Lavra, surround the chapel of St. George.

SAINT BASIL

Between the Katounakia and Kerassiá, at an altitude of 700 metres, stands the small church of St. Basil, around which cluster a few Kalyvia. The Skete of St. Basil clings to the sheer face of the mountain whose peak, 200 metres above the Skete, is crowned by the small chapel of the Prophet Elijah.

KERASSIÁ

The awesome, hair-raising, almost vertical mountainside forms, 800 metres above the sea, a sheltered, gently sloping valley, where cherry trees bloom. Here lies the Skete named after them (kerassiá = cherry tree). Initially it was inhabited by Russian monks, but now only a few Greeks have remained. One of the first well-known Western European visitors to Athos, Philip Fallmerayer, describing Kerassiá wrote: "*Majestic, above all, is the position of Kerassiá - 10 Kalyves nestling in the leafy woods, 800 metres vertically above the level of the sea. An enchanting scene!*" This monastic settlement which surrounds the chapel of St. George belongs to the monastery of the Great Lavra, as does the whole Desert area.

The Karoulia in the area of the Desert.

RETREATS AND HERMITAGES

In order to avoid the "worldly and noisy" way of life of the monasteries, already since the early years of Christianity many hermits retreated to the solitude of the *hesychasteria* and *asceteria*. In the region of Karoulia, also known as Thebais or "Vertical Desert" because the landscape is so harsh and the rocks fall so steeply to the sea, live the anchorites, totally immersed in contemplation and prayer. They have renounced the world and await their salvation with vigils and fasts.

By lengthy and arduous discipline, spiritual concentration and prayer, their spirit is trained until it can come near to God and see the "light of Tabor", the "divine light"; until it can approach the topmost rung of a spiritual ladder to heaven, as it is described by St. John of the Ladder (569-649).

Fasting and rigourous discipline are only the initial stages. Other anchorites spent their entire life perilously suspended over the fearful chasms which gaped hundreds of metres below them. They wrapped a rope, tied to a tree trunk, around their chests and, standing on the edge of the precipice, they leaned downwards, over the abyss.

The hermits still live today, as they did thousands of years ago, in caves or in primitive Kalyves. Their wasted bodies hardly need any food or even the water they may possibly find in some cavity in the rock. And when, one day, their soul departs from their feather-light body, their earthly remains rest there until some other monk seeking the Holy Quietude finds them and reverently keeps them in a corner of his ascetic dwelling, until he too completes his journey towards God.

THE JOURNEY TO ATHOS

In the past decades the Athonite monasteries were often swamped by dozens of pilgrims and "tourists" and the monks were considerably disturbed in their work and prayer, so that they were no longer able to follow their usual rhythm of life. The Athonite administration was therefore obliged to impose rules restricting the entry of visitors. No more than one hundred visitors a day are allowed to enter the territory of the Holy Mountain – Greek pilgrims may, of course, count on generous exceptions – and since this number is strictly controlled by the Greek authorities at Thessalonike, it is recommended that the visitor to Athos, if he is able to afford the period of waiting, follow the general suggestions below, although here, too, there are exceptions. Entry into Athos is permitted to men above the age of 18, although boys under this age may also obtain legal entry so long as they have been granted permission or are accompanied by their guardian.

The prospective visitor – the non-Greek one mainly – must request a letter of recommendation from some public body, such as his parish, a university, School of Fine Arts etc., which will serve to prove his "justified interest" in a visit to Athos.

This letter is sent to his country's embassy in Athens or consulate in Thessalonike, from which the prospective visitor will then receive an "accompanying recommendation" to be shown to the Greek Authorities. This second recommendation, and only this – or preferably a photocopy – is sent, together with the desired date of entry, by registered post, to the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Athens or, better still, to the Ministry of Northern Greece in Thessalonike.

Naturally, one can also present one's application in person, but before religious feast days and generally between the months of May and October, the demand for permits exceeds the allowed quota, and there could be a waiting period of several weeks. Thus, it is recommended that the visitor send his application as far in advance as possible, preferably several months before his desired date of entry. The expected answer from Thessalonike or Athens, confirming this date, should normally arrive about three to four weeks later. If not, one should write or, preferably, phone, to find out the reason for the delay.

It is only when he holds a written confirmation of the date from the Greek Ministries in Athens or Thessalonike that the visitor has some assurance of obtaining permission of entry. After presenting himself personally to the Ministry – preferably in Thessalonike – the visitor will now be provided with a written entry

permit, and can now begin his journey from Thessalonike to Ouranoupolis, either by taxi, or by one of the many buses leaving daily from the Bus Station in Thessalonike (which offer a much cheaper if less comfortable trip).

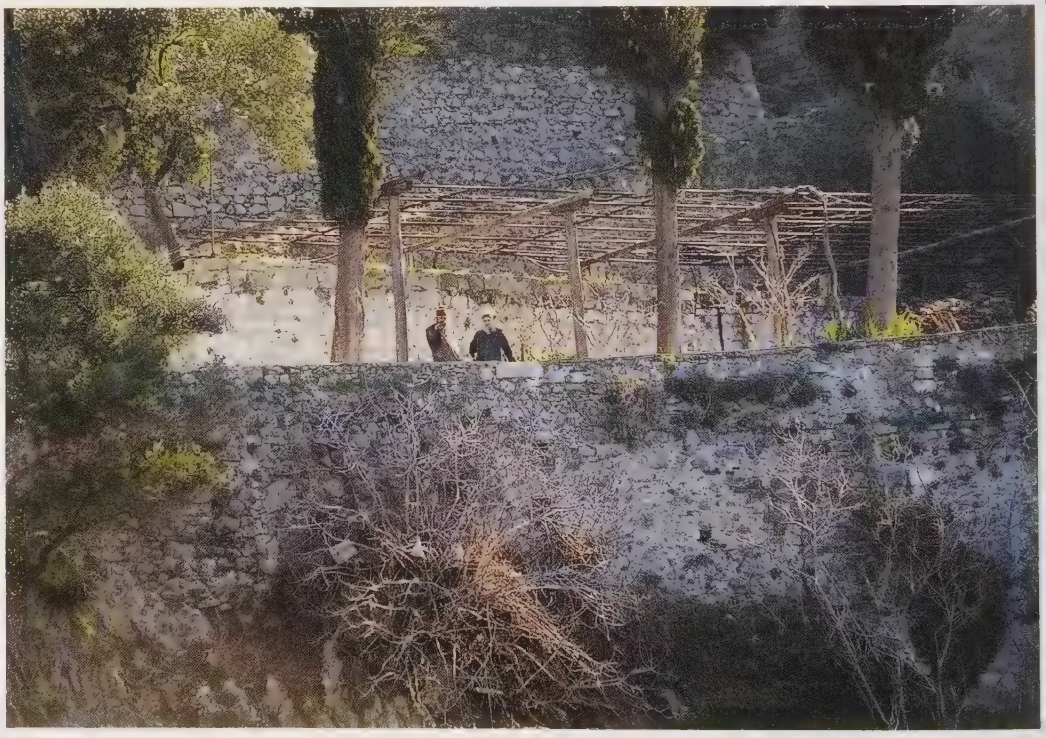
Since 1997 the Diamonitirion (residence permit) is no longer issued in the capital of the Holy Mountain, Karyes, but in Ouranoupolis, at the office of the Administration of the monastic community, which usually opens at 8 a.m. Here there is a special waiting area for visitors from abroad. Having shown his passport and entry permit from the Ministry in Thessalonike, and having paid a small entry charge, the visitor receives the document which allows him, first of all, to board the boat for Athos.

Upon his arrival at a Monastery, he must show the Diamonitirion, in order to be allowed to stay the night.

Pages 248-249: ***Ouranoupolis, the Gate to the Holy Mountain.***

Technological progress has been introduced on the Holy Mountain, so that all the monasteries now have telephones and phone booths. The visitor would thus be well advised to buy a phone card while he is in Ouranoupolis, since the Monasteries will only offer hospitality to those visitors who have announced their arrival at least one day in advance.

The holder of a Diamonitirion is allowed to board the large ferry that leaves daily around 9.30 a.m. from Ouranoupolis for Daphne. The journey takes approximately two hours, but one may leave the boat at any one of the intermediate stops and walk to a Monastery. After the boat's arrival at Daphne the visitor may board the bus to Karyes or continue his journey on the next boat. It must be noted that boats do not put in at the Monastery of Simonos Petra, unless, of course, by special request. A small lorry awaits passengers some 150 metres from the quay, behind the customs house and on the right. On the smaller quay on the left are the boats proceeding southwards, which put in at the next three Monasteries. They normally go as far as the Skete of St. Anne, and only on days when the weather is favourable do they continue further south, to the Skete of Kafsokalyvia. The pilgrim must participate in this short excursion and on his way back stop for the night either at one of the three Monasteries (a notification by phone of his arrival is recommended) or at the Sketes of Kafsokalyvia or St. Anne. Should there be a large number of passengers, there will be two boats



from Daphne for the voyage. The pilgrim must make sure he knows which boat puts in at each Monastery.

Usually it is the *portaris* (porter) or the *archontaris* (guest-master) who will welcome the pilgrim upon his arrival at a Monastery. His Diamonitirion will be checked and the visitor will be treated to a cup of coffee, some Turkish delight and a glass of raki. At sunset the gates of the Monasteries are shut, to open again the following morning after the Service. The gates do not usually open for belated visitors.

For a planned overnight stay at a monastery, the pilgrim should arrive in the afternoon, to enjoy a leisurely tour of the Monastery before attending Vespers. After Vespers the monks, together with any pilgrims or other visitors, take their evening meal in the Refectory.

The second meal of the day is sometimes served in the morning, directly after the first morning Service, or just before noon. However, it is always possible to request something to eat, should one have happened to be absent at the time of the main meal.

Although in recent years many forest tracks between the Monasteries have been opened, orientation is often difficult because of insufficient or erroneous signposting. In any case, if the visitor has made sure he has obtained the proper directions, he cannot lose his way on the Holy Mountain. He should, however, be prepared for long hikes, and carry with him a supply of food and water.

The visitor may generally ask the archontaris to allow him to visit the church outside the hours of the Holy Services. During the Service itself, non-Orthodox visitors may remain in the church, preferably in the narthex, from where they may follow the Service through the opening into the main area of the church.

It is most important, as a general rule, to strictly avoid the various kinds of typical "tourist" behaviour and habits. The Monasteries, the Sketes and the Kellia of the Holy Mountain are places of prayer and devout meditation. The Katholikon, the Refectory and the Treasury of the Monastery are not museums, and the monks are not tourist guides. Permission to take photographs within the monasteries – in the courtyards only – is given increasingly rarely in recent years, because of the disturbance this causes to the monks. However, by approaching the monks with courtesy, discretion and sensitivity (many monks speak English, French or German) the writer has been permitted – although not everywhere – to take the photographs for this book. If the visitor desires to win the regard of the members of the monastic community, he must not take photos without permission – photos of people, and of monks in particular.

In the past few years extensive road works have been in process on the Holy Mountain. The Monasteries are obliged to transport by boat the trees they log, on the sale of which their existence depends to some degree. Because of these road works the beautiful old paved roads are being destroyed in many places, and some journeys may now only be made along dusty tracks. However, the journeying pilgrim will still find marvellous old roads, such as that between the Monasteries of Gregoriou and Simonos Petra, or along the coast between the Monasteries of Panteleimonos and Docheiariou.

Although modern technology has invaded the Holy Mountain before the end of the second millennium, religious feeling and spirituality have remained unalloyed within the towering walls of the Monasteries. This spirituality is as sincere and joyous as it was ten or twenty years ago, or perhaps even one hundred or one thousand years ago, when Athanasius the Athonite founded the Great Lavra, the Monastery that contributed to such a great degree to the spiritual life of the Holy Mountain.

The Athonite monks live their faith in common, but each monk may, in his own way, develop his own spiritual powers, as he strives for union with God.

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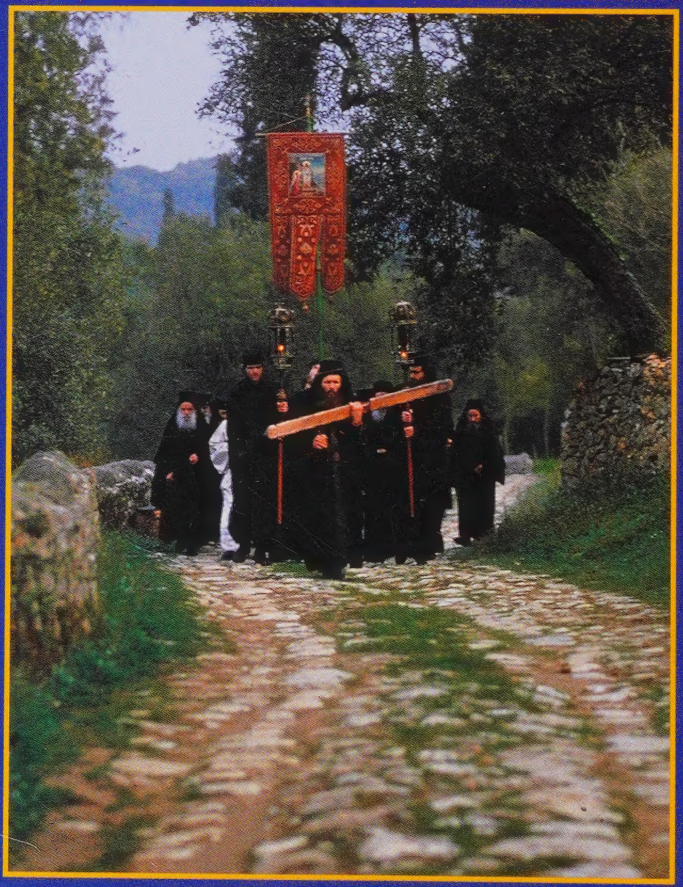

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